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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

BY

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"LIEUTENANT BARNABAS," "FOLLY MORRISON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

CHAPTER I.

MR. TICKEL MAKES A FINAL APPEAL.

ABOUT three hours after Blase had left the small house in Piccadilly where he had spent so many hours of happiness, but which he was never again to revisit, Mr. Tickel entered it. Without ceremony he walked up to the drawing-room and rapped at the door.

“No one is in the room, sir,” said the maid.

“Then will you take my compliments to Miss Liston, and tell her that I wish to see her?”

“Yes, sir.” And the maid closed the door upon Mr. Tickel, who had entered the room. In a few minutes she returned to him, and with a respectful bob, said :

“And you please, sir, mistress says that Miss Lydia has a headache this evening, and can’t see anyone.”

“Will you tell your mistress,” cried the parson warmly, “that ’tis not an affair of a headache, but a matter of life and death that Miss Lydia has to consider ; and look ye, my dear, here’s a crown piece to carry my message to the young lady herself.”

In response to this message Mrs. Romsey presently entered the room.

With a coldly ceremonious air, and a most stately courtesy, she replied to the parson’s stiff bow—

“You are not perhaps aware, Mr. Tickel, of the events which have taken place to-day.”

“I beg your pardon, madam, I am per-

fectly aware of what has taken place to-day."

"Then I am astonished that one professing an acquaintance with the usages of polite society should insist upon an interview after receiving the message that I sent."

"If I had come to see you I should have been very content to leave the house with such a fair excuse; but as my business in no way concerns you, you will forgive me if I stay until I receive an answer to my message from the person to whom it was sent," said the parson stoutly.

"You are vastly polite upon my word, sir; and your behaviour is of a piece with that of the person you have represented as a gentlemen of fortune, but of whom I had my doubts at first, which doubts, though they may have been for a time appeased, have now become positive convictions, whatever you may think to the contrary."

“I am not so unreasonable as you suppose, madam. I neither expect consistency in you nor stability in a weather-cock.”

“Do you compare me with a *weather-cock*, sir?” cried the lady with indignant emphasis.

“No, madam; for a weather-cock has the advantage of silence, a quality which I fear you are likely never to acquire; for a garrulous woman is like an old gate with a rusty hinge, and the older she grows the more noise she will make.”

“An old gate with a rusty hinge—upon my word!” And Mrs. Romsey sank into a chair in such astonishment that it really seemed as if she would be unable to support the character Mr. Tickel had given her. How on recovering from this surprise she might have continued the skirmish cannot be said, for at that moment the door opened and Lydia entered.

Happily for the poor girl the lamp upon

the table was shaded, and so she could hope that her swollen red lids, and her ashy cheeks would escape Mr. Tickel's observation. She had given her face a good bathing before she came down, and now she took a seat that placed her between the parson and the lamp. It was difficult for her to maintain an appearance of composure, and as Mr. Tickel seated himself silently she thought how different this was to other evenings when he had come with Blase bringing laughter and happiness into the quiet house; and then she bit her lip to check its quivering and bent her head to hide the tears that flooded her eyes again.

"Miss Liston," the parson began, in a tone of voice quite unlike that habitual to him, "I have not been sent here as an envoy. I have not even Mr. Godwin's consent to speak to you in reference to him. I come here solely on my own

responsibility to ask forgiveness for the mischief I have done, and to render justice to the best friend I ever had—the best, the kindest, truest-hearted gentleman that lives.”

As Lydia bent forward, her head bowed, a great tear plashed down upon her fingers, which were knitted together upon her knee.

Mr. Tickel was silent for a moment, then glancing towards Mrs. Romsey, he said :

“I think, madam, that as I may have something unpleasant to say about you, it would be well for you to leave Miss Liston and me to finish our interview alone.”

“On the contrary, if you have anything to say concerning *me*,” said Mrs. Romsey, “I consider it my duty to stay.”

“As you please, madam. I must tell you, Miss Liston, that Mr. Godwin’s pecuniary difficulties commenced long before he

saw you. They were plaguing him at the moment when I had the honour to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Romsey. In that first interview Mrs. Romsey was so indulgent as to give me a full description of her own affairs, and of those of all the members of her family. From her observations concerning the inconveniency of being a widow, and the eagerness with which she pressed me to introduce Mr. Godwin to you upon our return to London, I concluded that she wished to marry again. I may permit myself to say in my own defence that in speaking of Mr. Godwin on that occasion I confined myself strictly to the truth. I said that he had spent a fortune, and that he was heir to a baronetcy and a fine estate; that he possessed a present fortune was a supposition on the part of Mrs. Romsey which I did not find myself bound to correct. Here, thought I, is a chance for Mr. Godwin to release

himself from his difficulties. You perhaps know the generous feelings which compelled him to keep his poverty a secret from Captain Davenant. But his debts had to be paid, and to pay them some sacrifice was inevitable. He was not, however, prepared to make so great a sacrifice as that I proposed to him. He refused, despite my constant persuasion, to visit this house with a view to marrying Mrs. Romsey. I employed every means I could think of, even to the extent of making his debts seem more pressing than they were in order to bring him here; and it was only when he saw no means of escape that he accepted to be introduced, and then rather to oblige me than with any hope or intention of marrying Mrs. Romsey. I wished him to marry Mrs. Romsey in preference to you, because I saw it would be much easier of attainment. The conscientious objections he might have in

marrying a young and beautiful girl for money would not arise in paying his addresses to Mrs. Romsey. The advantage would be on her side, and her consent was to be had for the asking."

"Insupportable!" cried Mrs. Romsey.

"But, unfortunately," pursued Mr. Tickel, "the appearance and conversation of your good aunt settled the business. After a very brief conversation he rose to terminate an acquaintance which had been sufficiently long for him, when you entered the room, and made for him a new destiny. He loved you at once. The warmest, sincerest, most faithful love gave new life and quickly throbbing vigour to that poor heart that had grown dull and heavy with care. He loved you so well that when he left this house that day 'twas with the resolve to re-enter it no more—to lose you for ever rather than to win you under false pretences. I believe from my

soul that but for me you would never have seen Blase Godwin after that first visit. 'Twas I who persuaded him from that honourable act of self-denial. I was like the genius in the play—always at his elbow with plausible excuses, and urgent incentives; and so between us, Miss Liston, we brought him to do that which was utterly opposed to the guidance of his conscience.”

Lydia raised her head to look at the parson in surprise and inquiry.

“I say we,” continued the parson, “because without that chain of love which you wound round him he would have broke away from the feeble hold I had upon him. I brought him to your feet, but you alone had the power to hold him there. 'Twas not your money he wanted; that ever stood as a block between him and happiness; and 'twas alone from fear of losing you that he acted upon my advice and

concealed his poverty. That concealment I believed necessary, and persuaded him to believe so likewise. I did not think that you would marry a poor man; and I did not know that you had sufficient strength of character to act in opposition to the endless arguments which Mrs. Romsey was certain to raise against Mr. Godwin on finding that he was not what her foolish imagination had led her to suppose. I am all to blame. Had he been a rascal he would have won you against all odds. But he could do nothing well against his conscience. Had I let him go his own honest way there would have been no tears to shed. Oh, Miss Lydia, had you seen the poor wretch as I saw him ere I came here I should have no reason to beg your mercy. He showed no sign of giving way while he knew I was in the room. He was only very white and silent. He had told me the facts calmly, and without

adding one word of reproach for the mischief I had led him into ; and I left him sitting in the room with a single candle burning, and a book in his hand. But going back to the room for my walking-cane that I had laid in the corner, I found him with one of your violet gloves in his hands, and his face laid on his arm, crying and sobbing so that it seemed his very heart strings would snap ! ”

At this Lydia's handkerchief went up to her eyes, and she sobbed in sympathy. Here was an opportunity for Mr. Tickel which was not to be lost.

“ Surely, my dear young lady,” said he, “ knowing all, you will forgive that unhappy man.”

“ I *do* forgive him, with all my heart ! ” cried Lydia passionately, looking up while the tears still streamed down her cheeks.

“ And may I tell him so ? ”

“ Oh yes. Tell him that, and tell him

that I wish I had not spoken harshly ; and tell him that I am—oh ! so, so sorry ! ” and then she could say no more.

“ Why, that’s everything. You will see him here in half an hour, and he shall kiss the colour back into your cheeks,” cried Mr. Tickel joyfully.

Lydia shook her head and sobbed, her face being buried in her handkerchief.

“ Not ? ” exclaimed the parson in astonishment. “ But now you forgive him, you will love him again, and there’ll be a marriage and that sort of thing. If you are not quite in the mood to see him to-night, you will let him call upon you to-morrow ? ”

“ No, no, no ! ” sobbed Lydia.

“ Good girl,” whispered Mrs. Romsey in a tone of melancholy sympathy.

“ But do you know what will happen if you won’t see him to-morrow ? ” cried the parson, raising his voice.

Lydia looked up in alarm.

“If I may not tell him to-night,” Mr. Tickel said, “that you will be his wife, he’ll go to-morrow morning and shoulder Brown Bess.”

“Let him shoulder her, my dear—a hussy!” exclaimed Mrs. Romsey.

“You may not understand what I mean,” said Mr. Tickel. “Mr. Godwin has taken the king’s shilling, and to-morrow morning will be sworn in before a magistrate, and will be sent away with a parcel of other poor devils to be shot at by the French.”

“He has enlisted?”

“Yes; and he must serve in the common rank and file with all the scum of the land—he, a born gentleman—my poor Blase!”

Lydia had sprung up from her seat at the first cry of her womanly nature to save from the peril of death the man she loved. For a moment she felt as though she must run down the stairs and out into the street,

and through them to the house where her lover was in grief, and pray him on her knees not to leave her. Then reason showed her how foolish and useless it would be to offer such a prayer, and how ignoble it would be in Blase to accept it.

“ You will come with me in a coach and speak to him,” said Mr. Tickel persuasively, catching the first tender pity of her expression.

“ No,” said Lydia firmly, “ I will not speak to him—I will not even see him ;” and she sank into her chair again, for the thought of never again seeing Blase seemed to tear her heart.

“ And this is your final word ?” said Mr. Tickel, rising. “ You will not see him again ? ”

“ Yes ; that is my final word.” And the girl lifted up her face bravely, for she felt it was for her honour and his that this word must be kept.

“Very well,” Mr. Tickel said, taking up his hat and stick in wrath, “then you shall hear my last word. I tell you, my pretty miss, that you are a heartless young cat, and no more worthy of my loving boy Blase, than that flabby old frump behind you!”

And with this not very dignified adieu the parson flung out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

HOW BLASE WENT TO PICCADILLY FOR THE
LAST TIME.

WHEN Mr. Tickel got home he found Blase writing letters. He sat down in silence before the fire, and engaged himself for the next ten minutes with the tongs, arranging the coals and cinders one by one in a glowing pile, as was his habit when thoughtfully disposed.

“Been to the coffee-house, Tickel?” asked Blase kindly, as he finished closing a letter.

“No; Piccadilly,” answered the parson, still constructing the fire.

“Piccadilly!” exclaimed Blase, stopping suddenly, in the act of addressing the cover.
“What have you been there for?”

“I wanted to see Miss Liston, and let her know what my share was in this unlucky business.”

“I wish you had stayed at the coffee-house, parson. It can do her no good.”

“It hasn't—a heartless young——”

“What happened?” Despite himself Blase was eager for news.

“I told her it wasn't your fault.”

“And what did she say?”

“Nothing. Cried a little, you know.”

“She cried,” Blase said in melting notes.

“In course she did. 'Tis as easy for a girl to shed tears as 'tis for a robin to whistle.”

“Did she say nothing?”

“Said she forgave you with all her heart. What of that? There's nothing to forgive you. Said she regretted she had spoken harshly—said she was ever so sorry.”

“Go on, parson!”

“Then, says I, there's nothing now to keep you asunder; Blase may come, and

you'll make it all up. But she shook her head. Then I told her you were thinking of this soldiering foolery, and asked her if she wouldn't save you from it—asked her to come and speak to you. She wouldn't. Said she wouldn't even see you. Where-upon, seeing she had no sort of feeling for you, I made my respectful adieux, and came away."

"Of course she wouldn't speak to me. If she loves me at all she would give me credit for sufficient pride and decent feeling to—— Why, good God, parson! you don't think I would marry her after what has happened?"

"Not half so bad as enlisting for a soldier," the parson remarked with a sententious grunt.

The two sat silent for some minutes; then Mr. Tickel said:

"That reminds me, Blase, I've been talking to Ensign Baggerly about you—

didn't mention names, of course. He was hugely diverted at the notion of a gentleman entering the ranks."

"Was he?" said Blase, who had turned with a sigh to his letter, and was finishing the address.

"I suppose there's no shaking your resolution—you must be a soldier of some sort?"

"I must. By-the-by, Hutchins has got hold of the news somehow; and he came to me a little while since, and said if I entered the ranks he should come and fight by my side."

"There's a pretty thing for you! Your own servant can put himself on an equality with you. He may rub elbows with you, eat with you, drink with you, sleep with you for aught I know——"

"I hope my comrades may be as faithful as he. But he must be kept in London. Miss Davenant says, in her last letter, that her little maid, his daughter, is restless and

unsettled. If the girl should leave Redwater who is to protect her? I have told Hutchins he must stay with you until you have got rid of the house, and settled all my affairs. You must keep him with you. What do you intend to do?"

"The Lord only knows. It doesn't much matter what becomes of poor old Tickel. But that's neither here nor there. What we have to think of is this precious soldiering; and if you must go, why, the long and the short of it is you must enrol yourself as a gentleman volunteer."

Blase had begun another letter; he made no response, and the parson continued—

"You will be amongst men of decent condition; you will have a certain amount of liberty, and you won't be obliged to black your own boots. I wonder you didn't think of that yourself, Blase."

"I have thought of it," Blase said, without ceasing to write.

“And what’s your objection to it? With the Irish o’ one side and the French o’ t’other, isn’t there sufficient likelihood of your being shot?”

“The objection is, parson,” said Blase, laying down his pen and turning towards Mr. Tickel, “that a gentleman volunteer is at best but half a soldier, and I would be wholly a soldier or none at all. ’Tis time to be in earnest when one comes to grief by paltering.”

“But think of the hardships, Blase; to say nothing of the degradation of your life as a common soldier.”

“’Tis as honourable to serve the king with a musket as with a marshal’s bâton. And as for the hardships, I doubt if I shall find any so degrading as sneaking down a by-street to escape a creditor, or telling lies to support a false character. Physical hardships, long marches, heavy drills and the rest, they will be welcome; and the

more grievous they are," he sighed, "the less I shall suffer. Have these letters carried to post in the morning, parson—one to Captain Davenant, one to his daughter. There's no one else to write to." He was silent awhile; then he said: "She said she was very sorry—did you tell me?"

The parson nodded callously. Blase mused. The silence was complete.

"She cried, I think you said," Blase asked. Again the ill-humoured parson nodded, and then he began to whistle in a low tuneless fashion. Blase, with a sigh, aroused himself from his useless regrets, and turned again to his desk. A few letters he took out, tied them in a bundle, and slipped them in his pocket.

"I shall take a few guineas with me," said he, closing the desk; "the rest of the money you will find in the drawer here. You will know what to do with it. Here's the key." Mr. Tickel ceased whistling,

took the key, and slipped it in silence on his seal ring. Then he took up the tongs once more.

Blase stood in the middle of the room wondering what he should do next. He had expected to find so much to occupy the few remaining hours; and now everything was done, and it was still early. Going to bed was out of the question; he had no mind for reading, and clearly conversation was impossible with the parson in his present humour. The only thing to be done was to go and walk about the streets for a time. He left the room. Mr. Tickel, hearing the door shut, looked over his right shoulder and then over his left; then he went on with the everlasting arranging of the coals upon the fire. He heard Blase go downstairs; he heard the door bang, and knew that he was alone, as he must be in future. From the manner in which he continued fiddling the fire

about one would have imagined that he was merely sullen and surly because he couldn't have his own way ; but presently a tear slipped from his eye, and trickled down his fat cheek in testimony of his hidden sorrow.

“Young and old alike,” cried he, flinging down the tongs, “what fools we are! And stupid old fools some of us,” he added, blowing his nose vigorously as he rose from his chair. He rang the bell. “A logical proceeding upon my word,” he grumbled as he pulled the table closer to the fire “to show one's love by playing the bear in this way.”

Hutchins opened the door.

“Where's your master?” asked the parson savagely.

“Gone out, sir.”

“Then why did you let him go? Don't you hear the wind and the rain? What an ass you are, Hutchins! Don't you

know that to-morrow he leaves us? Bring up that big chair to the corner of the fire, and set the screen behind it. Where's his slip-shoes?"

"Here, sir."

"Give 'em to me, do. Now fetch the little copper kettle, and lay a clean pipe on the table by the chair there for him against his return. Good Lord! he may never smoke another with me! And then let me have a couple of lemons and the sugar, and my punch-bowl. Your master and I will make a merry night of it—for who knows but it may be our last. And look you, Hutchins, when you open the door just let your master see you with a cheerful face, for he has enough grief of his own to bear without being plagued with yours. 'Tis your duty, do you hear, to do all you can to send him away with a blithe heart. God only knows if ever he'll come back to us!"

For Blase there was but one pleasant path in all London, and that led to Piccadilly. Thither he walked through the wind and the rain, and coming near the small house he crossed the road. It seemed strange that he could not go to the door as usual. There was shadow under the park trees, and there he stood and looked across at the house where his heart lay. His very soul yearned to see the familiar rooms once more, even though he might not see Lydia, and he felt like a banished man looking on the land he may not enter. "If I might hear her voice; if I might see her face once more—only once more!" he thought. But there was no sign of her. There was no light passing from room to room—all was dark and dead. And so with his yearnings ungratified he stepped out of the shadow and turned to walk homewards.

It may have been purely accidental, or

it may have been by some subtle communication of ideas ; but just as he was passing under the lamp to cross the road again, Lydia raised the corner of her window-blind and looked down into the street. His head was bent to meet the driving wind ; but she recognized him at once.

“ Oh, my darling ! ” she whimpered.

The wind and the rain had cleared the streets. There was not a soul in the way but Blase. He and the night were alike cheerless and cold and miserable and desolate.

“ Oh, if I might comfort him !—if I might bear this grief alone ! ” sighed Lydia.

She drew a chair to the window, and sat straining her eyes to catch sight of him. She felt that if he passed again she should not have the courage to drop the curtain. She must let him see that she also loved and longed. But he came no more.

CHAPTER III.

LYDIA MEDITATES A BOLD STROKE.

THE parting was over. Blase went one way and the parson went the other. Mr. Tickel's heart was as heavy as it is possible for a stout, selfish old gentleman's heart to be. "Who shall I talk to of evenings now?" he thought. "What appetite shall I have for breakfast and supper with no one t'other side of the table? 'Tis the first time I have had to say good-bye to the fellow, no wonder the word stuck in my throat. 'T has become a habit to love him, and 'tis hard to give up one's habits at fifty. I'd rather have given up my bottle after dinner than his

company. Well, he's gone, and there's no more to be said; but a plague take pretty wenches, I say!" Thus ruminating he dropped into Welsh's; but there was no one there with whom he cared to stay, and the drink was tasteless, so in an ill-humour he turned his steps homewards for lack of interest elsewhere.

A coach was standing before the house when Mr. Tickel knocked at the door.

"There is a lady waiting to see you," said Hutchins. "Miss Liston, I think."

"Miss Liston! What the deuce can she want of me?"

"Can't say, sir. I told her my master was gone; and I said you were not likely to return till late. But she would wait, and she's been upstairs best part of an hour."

Mr. Tickel went upstairs with a slow and heavy step. Lydia was sitting near the fire at the further end of the room.

Her cheeks were pale ; there were dark circles round her eyes. As she heard a step outside the door she dropped her grey crape veil and rose from her chair and stood there with one hand upon the chair arm, the other upon her heart. She seemed to look beyond Mr. Tickel, as if in hope that someone followed him. As he closed the door, making her a stiff bow, she said :

“Is he gone?”

“Yes, young lady ; and ’tis ten to one we shall never see him again,” replied Mr. Tickel, knitting his brows ; then he closed his lips with uncompromising firmness.

The blow was too harsh. Lydia sank into the chair, and her two poor trembling hands went together as if in supplication for mercy.

“Have you come to stop him from going a soldiering?” asked the parson.

Lydia shook her head.

“That’s as well,” said Mr. Tickel,

savagely ; “ for if you entertained any hope of such a thing you would have had to put up with disappointment. I don't believe he would marry you now, if you went upon your knees and asked him.”

Lydia made no response, but clasped and unclasped her clinging hands in mute distress.

“ And pray, my pretty miss, what *did* you come for ? ” Tickel asked, little moved by a woe which he considered more merited and less deep than his own.

“ I—I couldn't stay away,” murmured Lydia. “ It was too hard to sit alone thinking of him—thinking that I might not see him ever again, and that, by a little sacrifice, I could come here to bid him farewell.”

“ Had you sacrificed your pride a little earlier, it might have been to some purpose. You might have led him how you liked if you had dropped in about

half-after eleven last night. He was broken down; he had no more strength than a chick. But 'tis a different matter to-day. He's a man again, and a stout-hearted man, too."

"And he is gone," Lydia said plaintively.

"Yes; gone to Woolwich in the same barge with a company of starved hedgers and ditchers, thriftless artisans, carriers, porters, and the like gentry."

Lydia sat some time in silence; the parson wondered why she waited. At length she asked timidly:

"Now that he is gone, Mr. Tickel, what shall you do?"

"Heaven only knows, young lady. I doubt if I shall eat a bit to-day."

Lydia was nervous, and when she spoke again it was with embarrassment.

"Mr. Tickel, will you be my friend?" she asked.

"No, madam, I won't," said the parson stoutly. "Whatever faults I may have, I have not the fault of being a turncoat; and I loved poor Blase too well to like any one who is an enemy of his."

"An enemy?"

"Yes; for when I asked you yesterday to save him from the peril of death by a single word, did you not refuse?"

"If I had spoken that word, would he have accepted it?"

Mr. Tickel was silent.

"I did not come to-day," she continued, "with any hope that I might turn him from his purpose. I could not wish him to do anything that would cause him to feel shame and regret. But I did wish to say good-bye to him; and the wish was stronger than my reason, which told me that I ought not to let him know how much I love him while it is uncertain that he can marry me."

“Is it uncertain?” asked Mr. Tickel.

“Yes,” she said, her voice trembling a little; and then she raised her veil as though it impeded her speaking freely. She looked so ill, so wasted and wan, so changed, that the feeling of humanity in Mr. Tickel’s heart was touched. He rose and fetched from the sideboard a bottle of mountain and a couple of glasses. “Had there been no hope,” continued Lydia, “I should not have waited here after hearing that he was gone.”

“Drink that, my dear,” said the parson. “You aren’t well this morning. As for hope, to be sure ’tis not certain the fellow will be killed; but I see no harm in letting him know that, if he returns safe, you will marry him. It might tempt him to keep out of danger, whereas, with nothing to live for, he’s likely enough to seek it, poor wretch.”

“It is not that,” said Lydia. “Mr. Godwin has too much honour, I believe,

to marry me after what has passed, unless he can recover his hereditary right to the Godwin estate."

"Then there's little hope of his marrying, for he's sold his right to the enemy who has patiently toiled to obtain it. The conveyance has been obtained by the subtle scheming of Father Dominick, in order that Sir Gilbert may be cozened into willing the property to the wretches who hold him in their power."

"I know that," Lydia cried, her eyes glistening with a feverish excitement. "But the will cannot be made until the conveyance is signed, and Mr. Godwin has only promised to sign."

"Ah, and there's no shaking him from that promise," sighed the parson. "I've tried."

"But suppose," cried Lydia, the colour rising to her cheeks and every muscle quivering with excitement—"suppose that

we can induce Sir Gilbert to renounce his claim upon his son ? ”

Mr. Tickel leaned back in his chair astonished.

“ My dear, what scheme is this you have in your head ? ” he asked.

“ A scheme to save Blase from his enemies. And now, will you be my friend ? ”

“ Why, that I will, with all my heart,” cried the parson, stepping forward and taking the girl’s trembling fingers in his great fat hand; “ and I’ll beg you to forgive my cruelty and rudeness into the bargain.”

“ I like you all the better for being rude and saying uncivil things to me,” Lydia said, with a little hysterical laugh. “ It shows how true you are to *him*.”

“ You’re the first woman I ever knew, my dear, that could pretend to such just philosophy. And now for your scheme, my brave little lady.”

Mr. Tickel had a great belief in the art of women. He maintained that a clever woman could get just whatever she set her mind upon getting; and the bright intelligence in Lydia's eyes led him confidently to hope that, by some cunning plan, she intended to force Sir Gilbert to give up the papers Blase had signed. It was therefore with great mortification that he listened to the explanation of Lydia's simple scheme.

"We must appeal," she said, "to Sir Gilbert's natural affection and his sense of justice."

"You might as well appeal," said he, "to the affection and sense of justice of a gatepost."

"I am of a different opinion," said Lydia firmly. "Only I cannot carry out my notion alone. I want someone to help me. I am afraid. I have never attempted to match my strength against any one; and

here we may count upon two, perhaps three, powerful enemies. You will be my friend and help me, for *his* dear sake?"

"Oh, I'll help you, my dear," said the parson rather carelessly, for his belief in woman's cunning had gone down to the feeblest glimmering. "'Tis only a matter of writing a letter or so."

"Letters would be useless; Father Dominick would intercept them."

"Why, you're right there, to be sure; but hang me if I see any other mode of appealing to him." Mr. Tickel's belief began to revive.

"He must be appealed to personally."

"Ah, to be sure. Catch him when he goes out a-pleasuring, and leaves that jack-priest at home."

"That would not be practicable. Mr. Eugenius is still in London. It will be well to consider him as possibly a friend, but probably an enemy. If he suspects

our intention and is an enemy he will communicate with Father Dominick, and we shall then have but a slight chance of addressing our appeal to Sir Gilbert."

"By George! you're in the right, my dear; but who would have thought that you could foresee these things? Well, and how are we to get at the baronet? We can't go into his house without an invitation."

"I think I can get that," said Lydia quietly.

"And then, my dear, what next? If his own son Blase failed to arouse his affection and sense of justice, how can you hope to succeed?"

Lydia hesitated a moment, whilst she seemed to gauge the depth of Mr. Tickel's fidelity through his little grey eyes; then she said:

"By going to work in a different manner, Mr. Tickel."

But Lydia relied on something more

than her method of proceeding. There was some secret power to be employed which she did not choose at present to reveal to Mr. Tickel. Of this the parson was convinced by the searching look she had fixed upon him in the very moment when he was thinking what a pleasure it would be to Blase to receive a full description of the girl's intrigue on his behalf. He now hastened to assure Lydia of his perfect fidelity.

“My dear young lady,” he said, “I shall be proud and happy to help you in any scheme in which the welfare of our dear Blase is concerned; and I perceive clearly that you have an extraordinary intelligence, for which I did not give you credit: and with that intelligence, supported by the worldly wisdom of a man who has seen a great deal of life, my dear, I have no doubt you will succeed. I beg you to have confidence in me.”

“I shall, Mr. Tickel—when I need your help. At present there is very little that you can do. It is when I am at Godwin’s Moat that I shall need you. I am a woman, and you know what happened to a woman in that house.”

“I know quite well.”

“Then you can understand my fear in visiting Godwin’s Moat—an enemy, and possibly a suspected enemy, of the man who did that deed.”

“Gads my life! You are a brave girl to dare so much.”

“I do not think I could dare,” she said with a little shudder, “if I had not a friend upon whose physical protection I could depend.”

“On that score, my dear young lady, you may make your mind perfectly easy,” said Mr. Tickel not a little flattered. “No harm shall come to you while old Tickel’s in the house. Besides,” he added, with a

sudden apprehension of the danger he himself must encounter, "there's Hutchins; we can keep him at hand."

"That is just what I want. Now I shall have no fear." She paused awhile, her eyes fixed in thought. "The first thing is to obtain the invitation," she continued; "that must come through Mr. Eugenius."

"How?"

"By letting things go on as if nothing had happened to shake my belief in his honesty, and—and," she dropped her eyes, "by taking advantage of opportunities. That he may not suspect our intentions you must come frequently to Piccadilly."

"But Mrs. Romsey?"

"You must apologise to her for your rudeness."

"A bitter pill, that. I'll swallow it however." Mr. Tickel had more than once, in thinking of his misfortunes, numbered amongst them the loss of Mrs.

Romsey's admirably served table. "Go on, my dear young lady. I submit myself to your guidance."

"To still further allay suspicion, do you think you could pretend to like Mr. Eugenius?"

"Of course I can. I've stood his friend over many a bottle."

"And could you pretend that you were Mr. Godwin's friend merely for the sake of what you could get out of him?"

Mr. Tickel looked up quickly to see if there was any sign of sarcasm in Lydia's face, and satisfied with her perfect simplicity, he said—

"I daresay I could do that."

"Then for the present only one thing more is necessary, and that is perfect secrecy. For if Mr. Godwin should hear but a whisper of this he would upset my plans, to save me from encountering danger."

"Upon my soul he shall hear nothing from me!"

Lydia rose, her limbs strengthened. her face animated with the new hope.

“’Tis wondrous!” exclaimed the parson, regarding her with admiration. “Tell me, my dear, when you planned this out.”

“In the night,” she answered simply.

Mr. Tickel reflected that *his* grief had not prevented him sleeping. And as he thought of this young girl lying awake in the night, subduing her feeling that she might think out how by risking her own life she might succeed in saving her lover’s, his admiration of feminine character rose to a degree which it had never before come near.

There was at that moment an earnest devotional look in Lydia’s face which led Mr. Tickel to believe that she was in prayer; as indeed she was.

“Oh, gentle Father,” rose the silent prayer, “watch over my love till I may be his wife.”

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH LYDIA TAKES HER FIRST STEP.

LYDIA was impatient to play her cards.

The prospect of winning back all she had lost, and more, made her forget what her loss had cost her, and heedless of the disastrous consequences that must attend defeat. She had undertaken to play a bold game—an audacious game for one so young and inexperienced in worldly affairs—and the knowledge that success depended mainly upon her own discretion and address acted as a stimulant upon her faculties. As Mr. Tickel in the language of that day said, the Apathy of Despair gave place to the Excitement of Hope. She shed no more tears, and if the pangs

of sorrow and regret pierced her heart, she suffered in the still hours of the night, when her thoughts were detached from the object she had set herself to achieve, and were free to dwell upon her banished lover and his misfortunes.

It was a great comfort to Mrs. Romsey the following morning when Lydia met her in the breakfast parlour to find a marked improvement in her niece's appearance. The girl's cheeks were still pale, and her eyes dark, as these might have been had she only suffered from a severe headache; but the expression of her face was not without a certain amount of liveliness, and the lids of her eyes were no longer swollen and red. And she ate two slices of dry toast.

Mrs. Romsey disliked sorrow; she knew of no greater happiness than to be comfortable. Her nature was deficient in that feminine sympathy which finds its highest

satisfaction in sharing the sorrows of others. Her religion was identical with Mr. Tickel's—she believed in a perfect future, where the unhappy and the happy should be separated widely, the one abiding at the bottom of a very deep pit, the other at the top of a very high heaven; and it was only logical to make the present life approach as near as possible to the future, as far as she was concerned.

“You can't tell how glad I am to see you eat, Lydia,” she said. “I shall make some posset for you to drink about eleven, and I bade cook stew you a dish of beef-tea for lunch, for I don't think you ought to eat solids, unless it were the lean of a mutton chop or the breast of a boiled chick, with a custard to follow. I should lie on the sofa with a soft pillow from my bed, and sip a little white wine, was I you, until dinner-time, and then some chicken broth and——”

“Why do you insist upon treating me as an invalid, aunt? My health is good.”

“Ah!” with a deep sigh; “if there had been a death in the house it couldn't have been more dreadful than it has been for these last two days, every one walking about on tiptoe, no one to speak to, and such a smell of cooking in the house. 'Tis the first time I have heard the sound of my own voice since that *man* left the house who shall never more enter it again with *my* consent, although what we are to do for society now, I really don't know.”

“I suppose we shall see Mr. Eugenius,” said Lydia calmly.

“If you do not forbid him the house, my dear.”

“Why should I forbid him the house? The statement he made was in his own defence, and for my protection. As I accused him of falsehood wrongly the least

I can do is to atone, as much as is possible, for the injustice I have done him."

"That is very reasonable indeed, Lydia ; and I must say it shows greater wisdom on your part than I gave you credit for. Why should we make ourselves uncomfortable? Well, we shall have one person to talk to, though I admit he is not so cheerful a visitor as I should like. When I look at him I can't help thinking I am in church, and ought not to laugh, or talk above a whisper."

"Perhaps Mr. Tickel may call," Lydia said with affected indifference.

"I should think he would hardly have the impudence to do that after what he said the other day ; and if he did we certainly could not receive him."

"Why not?"

"My love, do you remember what he called me?"

"Yes ; and I don't forget what he called

me," Lydia said, with a little laugh. "But I like him none the less for losing his temper in defending his friend."

"To be sure that proves his fidelity as a friend, and there never was such a man for recipes. He is the most agreeable man in conversation that I ever met with. His remarks upon the future state are most comforting; and he knows where the best of everything is to be got. The very day before this unhappiness had begun, he told me he had bespoke a dish of green peas for Saturday. Fancy, my love, green peas at this time of the year, and now we shall have no peas for Sunday. I must go to church hail, blow, or snow; and that Mr. Gravell talks so much about the brimstone fire that I have felt quite glad to stay at home and listen to Mr. Tickel's satisfactory explanation of that distressing Book of Revelation — which was quite justifiable with such weather as we are having

now. I wish I had written down all he had said upon that subject, and how he told me maccaroni should be dressed; but I don't in the least see how we are to receive him after confessing that he attempted to dupe us."

"He has not asked us yet. If he does he will be better able to apologize for his conduct than I am," said Lydia, and then she rose from the table and broke off the discussion for fear of saying too much. Already she felt the necessity of controlling her impatience and concealing her hand. It was above all things important that her collusion with Mr. Tickel should not be suspected.

She was in her room when Eugenius called to see her. Learning from the servant who announced his arrival that Mrs. Romsey was with him in the drawing-room, Lydia sent a message to say that she would descend shortly; then she took

out her watch and timed herself to wait five minutes, feeling sure that in that space Mrs. Romsey would recount the particulars of what had happened and unconsciously assist the deception which it was necessary to put upon the young man.

“My dear Mr. Eugenius!” Mrs. Romsey said, meeting the visitor with effusive warmth. “How *do* you do? Pray do not stand—take the chair by the fire.”

“I have your permission?” he said in a tone of inquiry and with a look of surprise.

“Certainly. And I may as well tell you at once that you are a welcome visitor here to my niece as well as to me.”

Here the servant brought Lydia's message, and left the room.

“I am astonished,” said Eugenius, as he slowly seated himself, speaking in a tone that supported the assertion—“I did not look for a reception of this kind.”

“I dare say you don't know all that has happened. In the first place, it is all over between Lydia and Mr. Godwin; they have separated for ever, and he has enlisted and gone away as a common soldier.”

“Enlisted! Separated for ever, and through me! Oh, madam!”

“My dear Mr. Eugenius, do not take it to heart. Depend upon it I should have found out everything if you had not spoken. I have had my suspicions all along.”

“I beg you to tell me what has happened.”

“To begin with, sir, Mr. Godwin came to see Lydia in the afternoon after your visit in the morning. What they actually said I cannot tell you precisely, as I was unfortunately out a shopping at the time; but when I came home I found Lydia in a state of mind bordering on madness, and I could get no explanation from her. All she could say was, ‘He's gone! he's

gone! we shall never see him again.' She was inconsolable, sir; she would take nothing. She shut herself up in her room, and refused to be comforted. I could hear her sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, and all the negus, and cake, and mutton broth, and tea I could think of would not induce her to open the door, until in the evening who should come to see her but Mr. Tickel; and very violent and very rude he was, and if it were not for the sake of peace and quiet, and the fact that he was beside himself with the thought of losing Mr. Godwin, I don't think I could pardon his behaviour to me. Well, sir, he protested that he was chiefly to blame for Mr. Godwin's misfortunes, and that Mr. Godwin had no choice but to do as he had done; finally, he told Lydia that Mr. Godwin was about to become a soldier, and that she alone had the power to save him from the peril of death, and with

that he begged her to forgive the unhappy gentleman, which she very readily did; but at the same time she gave him distinctly to understand that she could no longer think of being his wife. And her word she maintained although Mr. Tickel protested that her consent to the marriage could alone save Mr. Godwin. I am sure it gave her great pain to make this decision, for she liked Mr. Godwin very much, but the girl has a proper pride and I am sure would not marry a penniless gentleman if he were the smartest in the three kingdoms. She fretted a good deal after Mr. Tickel was gone, despite all I could do to cheer her; and yesterday morning before I was down—I kept my bed till mid-day for there was no inducement to get up—she took a coach and went to Mr. Godwin's house to bid him good-bye. She never once thought of complying with Mr. Tickel's entreaty—she is

too proud for that—she went there simply to bid him good-bye, because she could not abide the idea of his going away in the belief that she was cruel and unforgiving. However, when she reached the house she found that Mr. Godwin had gone, and Mr. Tickel had accompanied him, and so she had her journey for nothing. However, 'tis quite as well for them both; for had he seen how Lydia had been crying he would have nursed up the hope that when he came back from the wars—if ever he is to come back—the old relations might be renewed; and Lydia, with the knowledge that he entertained that hope, would have found it difficult maybe to accept another and better offer of marriage. Happily my dear niece has extraordinary good sense, and having come to London with the intention of marrying advantageously, she is not likely to retire into the country an old maid for the

sake of an unfortunate attachment, which was not, I believe, of the deepest kind. And then again, his ill-temper and sour looks during the past two or three weeks have lessened her interest in him to a noticeable degree. This morning she is quite collected and calm, and I promise you she looked not at all displeased when there was question of your calling to day. Tut, tut, what a world this is, Mr. Eugenius! what ups and downs, what twists and turns. I suppose from what you have told me of Sir Gilbert's affection for you that he will make you his heir."

"I cannot say what Sir Gilbert's intentions are."

"Well, well, if he should you would stand a good chance of winning Lydia, for she is prodigiously taken with your music and talk about poetry, and she's a chance of here and there one—for what with the money her father left and the

interest that's been accumulating since his death her fortune may be reckoned as close upon two thousand a year. Hush! I hear her coming down.—Let's be talking about something else. Yes, upon my word I do *not* think this horrid weather can continue much longer." The last phrase was spoken in a high voice as Lydia opened the door and entered the room.

Eugenius made no attempt to support this very palpable subterfuge. He cast a penetrating glance at Lydia, and made a low bow, dropping his eyes with characteristic humility.

"I have been listening," he said in a tone of respectful sympathy, "to an account of what has taken place since I was here last."

"Then I have only to apologize for doubting the truth of your statement," said Lydia, trying in vain to control the nervous quivering of her muscles.

“A doubt which simply proves the sincerity of your friendship requires no apology; and believe me, Miss Liston, I ventured to call upon you with no mean hope that I should receive such an apology, but rather that you would accept from me an explanation to vindicate my loyal attachment to Mr. Godwin and to you.”

“Prodigious polite, upon my word,” said Mrs. Romsey to herself. The good lady had accompanied the final speech with approving nods; she now thought it discreet to retire to the sofa, where she sat with her back to Lydia and Eugenius, and her ears wide open.

With an inclination of her head Lydia seated herself; Eugenius remained standing until by a gesture Lydia invited him to take a chair.

“That explanation, however,” Eugenius pursued, “is now unnecessary; since the

justice of my conclusions is confirmed by the event."

Simple Lydia could not quite see this, and she said so.

"I concluded that the greatest misery that Mr. Godwin could suffer would arise from a concealment of the real position in which he stood. Was I wrong?"

"No," Lydia replied after a moment's consideration.

"So I believed," said Eugenius. "And that you also recognized the fact is made clear by your preferring a painful separation to a yet more painful union. And since this is so I need not seek to exculpate myself for making known a fact which it was necessary for your mutual happiness that you should know."

Lydia bowed in assent. It suited her to accept this logical exposition as satisfactory, otherwise she might have found many objections to it, despite the con-

clusive reasoning of Eugenius. His easy victory was a surprise to him, and for a couple of minutes he said nothing. Then with some hesitation :

“May I hope that you will permit me to call upon you at intervals, Miss Liston?” he said.

“Why not?” she replied. “Have you not shown that you still merit our esteem?”

“I hope so. But hitherto I have visited you as Mr. Godwin’s friend.”

“And you are still his friend, are you not?”

“Undoubtedly, so far as *my* feelings are concerned.”

“Then why should you doubt our welcome?”

“Because I have regarded your reception hitherto as a privilege accorded in courtesy to Mr. Godwin, whose companion I was; and because,” he added with an

air of deep dejection, "it has been my bitter misfortune to inspire dislike in those whom I most wished to please."

"I beg, sir," said Mrs. Romsey, turning round on the sofa, "that you will not credit us with any such wicked prejudice; and if you wish to please me, the oftener you come and see us the better you will succeed."

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MR. TICKEL COMFORTS THE LADIES.

EARLY on Saturday morning, as Mrs. Romsey was sitting before the fire in dismal solitude, the servant announced Mr. Tickel. At that name the good lady's heart leapt up with joy ; but she assumed an expression of cold severity, and rose from her chair with dignity when the parson entered the room.

Mr. Tickel held his hat and stick in one hand, and in the other he carried a basket covered with a certain bluish kind of paper, peculiar to the use of fruiterers. He made a most profound bow, and appeared to be no less grave than Mrs. Romsey ; then he seemed to be embar-

rassed as to what he should do with the little basket, until at length, with extreme care, he set it upon the corner of the side-board, where it was well in sight. The solemn silence was broken only by a faint click as Mrs. Romsey unconsciously turned her tongue in watching the manipulation of the little basket. Having debarrassed himself, Mr. Tickel turned about, and with as much gravity as if he were reading the burial service, said :

“Madam, it is my duty as a Christian. and my desire as a friend, to ask your pardon for certain words which in the heat of anger escaped my lips at our last meeting. Anything more cruel, more undeserved, or more false man never said of woman. To-day, madam, is Saturday—a day on which we settle up our accounts for the past week, and lay in a stock of provisions for the week to come, in order that on Sunday no uneasy reflections with

regard to the past, no anxious doubts with respect to the future, may disturb the tranquil enjoyment of that day of rest and its concomitants." He coughed, and glanced towards the sideboard. "What day, then," he proceeded, "could be more appropriate than this for begging you to discharge your mind of the unpleasant recollections of the week, to provide for your sociable wants of the time to come, and so ensure for to-morrow that peace of mind without which it were impossible to thoroughly enjoy the dish of green peas which I promised to bring you, and which is contained in that little basket on the corner of the sideboard?"

"You are very eloquent, Mr. Tickel, and I daresay it is also my Christian duty to forgive you; but really, you said such things. You know you compared me to an old post with a rusty hinge, and a weather-cock also."

“Madam, I will not attempt to defend myself. I will not say that you aggravated me beyond endurance; I frankly confess that I was guilty of the grossest calumny that the worm ever put into the mind of man.”

“Well, sir, we will let bygones be bygones; and so we will shake hands and be friends again.” With these words Mrs. Romsey gave her hand, and heaved a deep sigh of relief. “I will call Lydia,” she continued, “for you have to obtain her pardon as well.”

Mr. Tickel had undone the paper, and being too deeply engaged in uncovering the peas to take any notice of Mrs. Romsey’s observation, he now turned, and offering the basket, exclaimed, “There, madam!”

“Quite a picture, indeed!” said Mrs. Romsey; “but I hope you don’t think I was influenced in forgiving you by the sight of your present?”

“Not in the least. But do you know what I should have done with those peas if you had refused your forgiveness?”

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Romsey, rather terrified by the severity of the parson’s mien and voice, thinking that he possibly meditated trampling them under his heel.

“Why, madam,” cried Mr. Tickel, “I should have taken ’em away with me!”

This was not what Mrs. Romsey had expected; nevertheless, it was a sufficiently unpleasant alternative to make her more pleased that amity was once again restored.

“And now,” said Mr. Tickel, “if you will be good enough to take them downstairs and tell cook to keep them in the dry end of the pantry, and at the same time send Miss Lydia to me, for I have to obtain her pardon, I shall be very much obliged to you.”

Left to himself, Mr. Tickel had scarcely

time to whistle a couple of bars of his favourite melody, "The Lass of Richmond Hill," when Lydia came to him.

"Have you seen him? Have you heard from him?" were her first words as she put her hand into the parson's, and looked into his face with eager anxiety.

"Yes, my dear young lady, I *have* seen him. I was at Woolwich yesterday. He was in a yard with a squad of raw recruits, drilling; but I picked out our dear Blase at once, though he wore the same coat as the rest. For not only was he the finest man of the company, but his presence was that of a gentleman which neither dress nor surroundings could disguise." Lydia's face flushed with pride hearing this. "The drill being over," continued the parson, "he came to me and, curiously enough, his first words were almost identical with yours. 'Have you seen or heard anything of her?' says he. It seemed a cruel shame

to tell the poor fellow a lie, and make him believe that you had let him go to his death without a word of farewell; and while I was hawking and stammering to find words—‘You have seen her!’ cries he. ‘For God’s sake, parson! tell me the truth!’ Whereupon I told him how you had come to bid him good-bye. ‘God bless her!’ says he.”

Lydia dropped her head and felt for her handkerchief.

“‘She’s the sweetest, noblest girl that breathes!’ says Blase. ‘Yes,’ says I, ‘she is.’”

Lydia sobbed.

“‘But,’ says I, ‘’tis all over between you, Blase. You mustn’t think that because she likes you still, the girl would marry a beggared gentleman.’ ‘What!’ cries he in a fury, ‘do you think I’d ask her to, you stupid old fool?’ I give you my word, my dear, he called me a stupid

old fool!" the parson said, laying his hand gently on Lydia's shoulder.

The poor girl laughed through her tears hysterically.

" 'I'm a man now,' he went on, 'and I love her as a man should. No deed of mine shall ever make her love me less.' Then having leave from the officers we went out of the barracks, and drank a bottle together at a tavern, where he told me of the regulations to which he had to submit, and hard enough they are for a gentleman of his condition; but he seemed not displeased with the life, and said he had made the acquaintance of one or two very honest fellows, bricklayers by trade, who had been thrown out of work by the hard frosts. 'And now,' says he, 'that we're all washed alike and dressed alike, I find the relative merits of an honest bricklayer and an indolent gentleman pretty fairly balanced.' "

“That’s nonsense,” said Lydia, drying her eyes briskly, and looking up with a sort of indignation that any comparison should be thought possible between Blase and an artisan.

“To be sure it is, and so I told him flatly. And then, time being up, we went back to the barracks and parted. ‘If you should see her again,’ says he, as he held my hand, ‘you may say, that no matter how I end my days, my last thought shall be of her.’ ”

Lydia hung her head once more, and it seemed as if she must bring her handkerchief again into use ; but Mr. Tickel, to avert her thoughts, took her hand, and leading her to a chair, said :

“Come, we are forgetting our own affairs. Tell me what has happened. Has Eugenius called upon you ? ”

“Yes. He came on Thursday.”

“Ah ! and I warrant he gave a good account of himself.”

“What he said in justification of his action has since seemed to me so reasonable that I cannot think he is Mr. Godwin’s enemy.”

“He’d be a clumsy rogue indeed if his tricks were to be seen through at the first glance. Whatever he be, you must think of him only as an enemy.”

“’Tis so difficult to think that, and at the same time to give him my hand and speak to him in a tone of friendship.”

“’Tis difficult, and repugnant to your feelings also, I’ll be bound, my dear young lady. It must go to the heart of a soldier—if he be a feeling man—when first he levels his piece to take the life of a man that has never done him harm; but ’tis his duty to play the part allotted him in the cause he has undertaken to defend. And so it is with you, my dear. You must leave your feelings behind you if you would fight this battle to any purpose.”

“That is quite true. Don’t think that I am faint-hearted, or that I repent of having undertaken this task. I *will* succeed,” she said, with a little stamp of her foot, “if success depends upon my perseverance and thought ; but it is natural that one should recoil from treachery—isn’t it ?”

“Why, to be sure, for a little lady like you there must be some such hesitation at first, but I’ll be bound ’twill wear off, as the soldier’s qualms disappear when he gets into the thick of the battle. At present there’s little treachery needed. If you are inclined to think Eugenius a friend—as he may be for all we know certainly to the contrary—treat him as a friend ; that will be all to the good ; but for heaven’s sake, my dear, do not let him know anything of your motives and your hopes. If he is an enemy, be sure he is a cunning one, and ’tis the nature of such enemies to be as suspicious and to have as many turns as

a fox. You accepted his explanation, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And consented to his calling upon you again?—for I doubt not he asked that favour."

"Yes."

"Then I warrant he is already puzzling his long head to find an explanation of your indulgence."

"Why should he? His explanation was very logical and rational."

"Doubtless, but very few young ladies in your position would listen to reason. Depend upon it, he will try his best to make you believe he is the sincerest friend Blase ever had, in order to sound your thoughts on the subject. Match cunning with cunning, my dear, and you may succeed; happily, you will have old Tickel at hand when there's more lying to be done than you are equal to. Mum!—Here comes aunty!"

CHAPTER VI.

HOW LYDIA BADE HER LOVER GOOD-BYE.

A MONTH passed away, and to Mrs. Romsey it appeared that the stream of life was running as smoothly as if its even flow had never been broken by a turbulent whirl of passion. To be sure, Mr. Godwin had dropped out of sight; but he never interested her greatly, at least so she tried to believe, and Mr. Eugenius had taken his place. It was also probable that they should see no more of Captain Davenant and his daughter. Lydia had written to Miss Davenant, saying that under existing conditions it might be advisable to postpone the visit to Redwater; and Miss Davenant

had replied in a very cold and formal manner, saying that in this regard she was perfectly in accord with Miss Liston. That was no great source of regret to Mrs. Romsey, for she had learnt from Mr. Tickel that the table at Redwater was poor and the bedchambers cool. She had a much stronger desire to see Godwin's Moat and its inhabitants, who, from what she could discover, were a pleasant, free-living sort of people ; and it was quite within the range of possibility that they should receive an invitation from Lady Godwin if Lydia would be reasonable, and if Mr. Eugenius could lay aside a little of his natural diffidence.

Lydia was not unreasonable. She made Eugenius welcome when he came, and by her frank cordiality did much to remove the humiliating sense of unworthiness which oppressed him. He read well, and she was pleased to work and listen to him ; he was a good musician, and frequently

when he was at the piano she would raise her eyes from her work and let them rest upon his earnest scholarly face. He played from memory mostly, and at these times he would close his eyes and assume an air of rapture. He must have observed more than once in raising his lids, that Lydia's fingers were lying idle on her work and that she was gazing at him with a sort of childish awe. A man must be absolutely destitute of vanity who cannot be cheated by the eyes of a pretty woman.

Lydia was careful not to overact her part, and though she showed a growing interest in Eugenius, she suffered him to see that she had not forgotten Blase. "If you can make him jealous, my dear," said Mr. Tickel, in one of his confidential chats with Lydia, "so much the better. It will do him good, and us also."

But Eugenius showed no disposition to be jealous; it was quite as often he that

spoke of Blase and his misfortunes as Lydia, and always with an unstrained generosity which kept Lydia in doubt as to his real character, and occasionally shook Mr. Tickel's convictions.

Eugenius and the parson usually left the house in Piccadilly at the same time. One night Eugenius said :

“Mr. Tickel, may I ask if you have heard any ill news to-day?”

“Yes, I have heard ill news. But pray how did you come to know that?”

“You have a tell-tale face, sir. Something concerning Mr. Godwin has disturbed your mind, I fear.”

“Yes. They consider him ripe enough to be cut down, and on Friday he is to march off from Woolwich to Chatham, and thence he and his fellows are to be shipped off to a convenient slaughtering ground. I shall see the last of him o' Friday.”

“Will there be time for Captain Dave-

nant to come to London?" asked Eugenius after a pause.

"I believe so. Blase tells me that he has despatched a letter to him. I shall go to Woolwich, of course. But I beg you, sir, to say nothing of this matter to Miss Liston."

Eugenius walked in silence for a few moments; then he asked—

"Why not?"

"Why not?" echoed the parson. "Because the poor soul still thinks of him with tender regret, and she'd be for going down to see him off as like as not."

"And why should she not see him at that time, if it is her desire? We may be sure poor Blase will be scanning the women's faces with the hope of getting one last glimpse of hers. It will be some consolation to him, perhaps; and I believe that Miss Liston would grieve to think she had not given him that consolation."

“That’s true,” said the parson, and then he thought, “one would fancy this man was the poor fellow’s best friend to hear him !” After a few paces in silence, he said, “Shall you go, sir ?”

“No. It would give him no pleasure to see me. He might even believe that I was there to insult him, so perverted are his views by the antipathy which it has been my misfortune to provoke.”

“’Tis the strangest prejudice that ever a man of sense and honest disposition ever took into his head ; and all because you happen to resemble a man whom, rightly or wrongly, he takes to be his enemy.”

“Rightly or wrongly,” Eugenius repeated with a sigh. “But that is not what concerns us at present, sir. It is the happiness of Blase and Miss Liston we have to think of. Could you not take Miss Liston with you on Friday ?”

“I might make the suggestion to her,

for her to accept or decline, as she thinks fit. For Blase 'twould be an unspeakable joy. By George, sir, 'tis an odd sort of revenge you take for all the ill-treatment you have received."

"I seek but one revenge," Eugenius said fervently, "one triumph to balance all that I have suffered! and that is to put into his hands the covenant he has signed, and force him to acknowledge that I am his friend; and who knows," he added, dropping his voice so that he seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to Mr. Tickel, "who knows but that I may succeed?"

"Give me your hand, sir," cried the parson, who seemed to be greatly moved by this generous avowal, "and let us drop into the tavern over the way, and drink a glass to your success."

Mr. Eugenius accepted the proposal, for despite his Christianity and his ascetic

look, he had a taste for wine and other mortal pleasures, if Mr. Tickel did not wrongly construe certain covert glances cast upon the women that they passed in the street.

“I never expected to see a saint in knee-breeches,” said the parson to himself, when he had parted from Eugenius and was walking slowly homewards, “but certainly this Eugenius is a saint—if he isn’t a sinner. He is one or the other, and not like most of us, a little of both. He doesn’t come of a line of saints, that’s certain; and I am inclined to think there is a good deal of hereditary talent in Master Eugenius—he has a certain amount of subtle shrewdness from his father the priest, I should say, and a fair portion of deceptive ability from his mother the actress. He is clever without a doubt; but if he thought a shallow show of generosity would get more out of a simple old parson than a

glass of wine, he was very much in error!"

The following morning Mr. Tickel called upon Lydia, and told her that Blase was about to leave Woolwich for Chatham, where he might at once be put on board a transport. The colour faded from the girl's cheek as she listened, and she sat looking with fixed imploring eyes at the parson, as if he had pronounced a sentence which might be revoked.

"I have told you of his departure beforehand, my dear," said the parson, "because if you don't think it amiss, you and I might go to Woolwich, and see our dear Blase march off."

With a little cry of joy Lydia sprang from her chair, her eyes full of tears and her face radiant with happiness, and then she threw her arms round Mr. Tickel's neck and kissed his fat cheek.

"But," she said suddenly, releasing him,

“can this be done without injuring our plans for his happiness? Will not Eugenius suspect us?”

“Not a bit, my dear; for ’tis his proposal.”

“Then he cannot be an enemy to Blase.”

“That remains to be seen. I have more to tell you on that head by and by. At present we must think about the journey. The company marches at nine o’clock tomorrow morning; so we had better go to Woolwich this afternoon before the light fades. You can take your maid with you, for I warrant Mrs. Romsey has no fancy for the expedition, and we will put up at the Anchor, which is an excellent hotel. And now if that’s settled I’ll go to my friend in Long-acre and order a good stout coach and a pair of strong horses.”

It was half-past five when they entered the main street of Woolwich. Mr. Tickel, whom the motion of the vehicle had sent

to sleep soon after passing Deptford, was peacefully reclining in one corner of the coach, Lydia was pressing her face against the glass scanning the people on the footway. The coach moved at a walking pace over the rough stones with which the street was paved. A good many people were walking, and there was enough light to show their features with tolerable distinctness.

Suddenly with a cry of alarm Lydia threw herself back and clutched at Mr. Tickel's arm.

"What's the matter my dear?" he asked, withdrawing his arm from the girl's convulsive grip.

"Look, look!" she said, pointing to the footway, and then putting her hand up to her face as if to hide it.

Rubbing his arm, which still suffered from Lydia's pinch, Mr. Tickel winked his heavy eyes and tried to see things clearly.

“Don’t you see? there!” whispered Lydia.

Then Mr. Tickel made out a soldier walking a little way in advance of the coach and in the same direction, with a thin old gentleman on his right, and a little lady on his left.

“Why, to be sure,” said the parson, “by the size of him that might be Blase.”

“It *is*,” Lydia cried emphatically.

“Ah, and the old gentleman and the lady may be Captain Davenant and his daughter.”

“Very likely.” She clasped her hands together and watched them for a minute in silence, then turning to Mr. Tickel, her pallor making her look almost ghostly :

“May I get out?” she asked.

“No, my dear,” said the parson firmly, “that must not be.”

She seemed to know that he was right, for she made no further appeal, but with a deep sigh turned to the window.

At that moment the little party stopped before the door of the George Tavern, and as Captain Davenant fell back and Blase led Miss Davenant into the house Lydia caught a glimpse of his face, which seemed to her more manly and handsome than ever she had seen it before.

The Anchor stands a little higher in the street, and Lydia spent the evening in watching from the window; but as the barracks lay in the other direction she saw no more of Blase and his friends that day.

A very admirable dinner was served, but Mr. Tickel had little assistance from Lydia in eating it.

The girl did not sleep a wink all the night, and when her quick ear caught a distant bugle call, she could lie in bed no longer, though the hour was but five.

She was in an agony of fear all the time Mr. Tickel was at breakfast lest the com-

pany should march before they were out in the street; and the slow and steady manner in which he drank and ate provoked her to such a degree that she could not look at him.

There never was such a glutton! he ate a great deal of everything, and even soaked up the gravy with his bread. It seemed to her unfeeling to eat like that at such a time, but according to Mr. Tickel's philosophy this was the very time a man should eat, in order to forget care, and counteract the effect of mental depression.

At length he laid down his knife and fork, and Lydia ceasing to tap the floor with her pretty little foot, rose from her chair. She had been dressed and gloved half an hour.

"My dear," said he, "you made me come down to breakfast too early; there's eight just striking and nothing more to do for another hour."

“Yes, there is. Come out into the street,” she said; and she took his arm and never left go of it until she had him out in the open air.

Just as they turned their faces towards the Gravesend road they perceived Captain Davenant and Miss Gertrude coming down the street, and not a dozen paces from them. Blase was not with them. Lydia trembled and Mr. Tickel pressed the hand which lay on his arm to his side. Captain Davenant was more upright than ever; Miss Davenant had been crying and her eyes were yet red and swollen. This was all Lydia had time to remark before they passed. It was clear that the recognition was mutual, for the captain saluted Lydia, though without the least attempt to stop; but Miss Davenant looked straight into her face and made no sign of acquaintance, though both Lydia and Mr. Tickel bowed.

This hostility wounded Lydia's suscep-

tible heart, though she knew it was unmerited.

“She did not even bow to me,” she said in a low tone, after they had walked for some distance in silence.

“My dear, that little lady *can't* forgive you. I warrant Blase did his utmost to make her love you; but women would not be guided by Solomon when their feelings are concerned. Don't take it to heart, my dear; there'll be a day, I hope, when that angry little lady will kneel to kiss the ground you have trodden.”

They had determined to go a little way from the town, and to see Blase pass where there was no throng of people; so they walked along the road until they had reached the open country outside the town, and there they paced up and down near a gate that opened upon a field, catching the sounds that came from the town. Suddenly they stopped.

They heard the drums and fifes.

Then there followed a roar of voices which made even the sound of the shrill fifes indistinct. Nearer and nearer the sounds came—now a little louder, now less distinct as the angles and breaks in the streets modified them; but gradually the fifes grew louder and the voices fewer.

Lydia's knees shook together, and her teeth chattered as though she were attacked with ague; and the parson putting his arm around her held her close to his side, or she must have fallen.

Then all at once the fifes grew much more shrill, and half a dozen urchins ran into sight; and the next moment the red coats were in view.

“There they are!” cried Lydia, and with a suddenly acquired strength she sprang from the parson's side and went running along the road towards the advancing column, with Tickel behind

begging her to stay. A dozen or so of men and women still marched beside the column; but the main body of friends who had collected to bid the men good-bye was left in the town.

Lydia passed the deafening fifers and along the column, her eye scanning each rank she passed until presently, with a cry of delight, she dashed right between two ranks of men and flung herself upon the breast of her lover. There was a good deal of rough laughter, for her impetuous charge had broken up the line, but the men made way for Blase to carry the sobbing and laughing girl into the sideway.

“My darling, my darling, my darling!” was all she could say.

“May God bless you for this, you beloved soul,” murmured Blase, and then he closed his lips upon hers saying good-bye.

As he lifted his face he made a sign to the parson.

“Take her,” he said, and he put the girl, who had fainted away, into the parson’s arms, gave a nod of recognition and adieu to his old friend, picked up his piece, and ran to overtake his rank.

And the drums and the fifes mocked his sorrow with their gaiety.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARSON GETS A LETTER FROM DUBLIN.

WHEN they parted on Friday night in Piccadilly Lydia promised Mr. Tickel that she would “be a good girl and not cry;” and as it was for the sake of Blase that she should conceal her deeper feelings from Eugenius, she succeeded in stemming the natural outflow of her grief. Her eyes were bright and clear, if they were not happy, on Saturday; and she took pains to make her toilette attractive when the hour drew near for her visitor to call. But Eugenius did not come that evening.

“Why has he stayed away?” she asked of Mr. Tickel when she left the drawing-room to accompany him to the door.

“Probably he wishes you to see how delicately considerate of your feelings he is at this moment.”

Lydia was silent awhile; then, in a despondent tone, she said :

“A month has gone, and I have done nothing.”

“Pardon me, my dear young lady, you have done wonders. You have prevented his seeing your design. Be patient, for without patience and constant care you cannot hope to succeed. If Mr. Eugenius is what we take him to be—a very sly fox—he won’t let you catch him if he thinks you are anything more dangerous than a little duck.”

Lydia saw the wisdom of this advice; but patience seemed impossible to her with her lover’s happiness, nay, his life even, dependent on the speedy execution of her project.

If Blase himself had been expected she

could not have been more particular in her choice of dress and adornments than she was the following day. She declined to go to church in the morning, thinking it just possible that Eugenius might call to inquire after her health. She was at the piano the whole morning, playing from a selection of Bach's fugues that Eugenius had brought for her. As soon as the early dinner was over she returned to the piano and Bach, and she was still playing Bach when the door opened and Eugenius was announced.

"I am so glad to see you!" she said, with a truthfulness which was supported by the tone of her voice and the expression of her face, and she gave him her hand. "Why have you not called to see me since Friday?"

"I feared that intrusion would be unwelcome at this time," Eugenius said.

"You thought that it would be less

painful to lose two friends than one, perhaps," Lydia said, with a little laugh.

"I have not ventured to think that I might be classed with Mr. Godwin in your esteem."

"You make me fear that I have ill repaid your regard for me. Have I seemed cold and distant in my manner?"

"Far from that. You have given me such proof of friendship as it has never before been my happiness to receive."

She looked at him in seeming perplexity.

"I can't quite make that out," she said, seating herself. "If you know that I am glad to see you, why should you stay away at a time when I most need a friend to chase away the useless regrets that one must feel in losing a dear friend? Supposing my aunt and Mr. Tickel had served me in the same manner, what *would* have become of me? Surely," she added, with another little laugh, "you don't mind

thinking you stand as high in the scale of friendship as Mr. Tickel?"

"If I am too diffident, Miss Liston, it is because my hopes exceed the scope of my audacity, and hold me in trembling inaction, like the wretch who would leap a gulf but that he fears to fall."

"What hopes?" asked Lydia, with most innocent wonder in her eyes.

Eugenius hesitated for a moment, then :

"Hopes," he said, "which I dare scarcely whisper to myself, but yet are present in my mind, like the light which penetrates the closed eyes to tell the sleeper that the dark night is past and a glorious day at hand."

Lydia looked still at him in perplexity ; then she let her eyes drop.

Emboldened perhaps to an unexpected degree, Eugenius drew his chair closer to Lydia's.

"What is he going to do? Does he

mean to touch me?" thought Lydia in alarm, her whole nature revolting against an event which she had taken such pains to bring about. "No, that shall be never;" and she rose from her chair quickly, with an instant perception that her repugnance must in some manner be marked.

"Mrs. Romsey is in the next room; shall we join her?" she said.

"One moment, I implore, Miss Liston," said Eugenius, rising. "I beg you to forget what I said a moment since. I was hurried by my feelings into a confession of presumptuous hopes, which now I deeply repent. I beg you to be seated."

Lydia sat. Her cheeks were yet aflame with the blush that had risen at the mere thought of Eugenius taking the hand she had given to Blase.

That she was not angry with Eugenius seemed clear by her again seating herself

at his request. What could he suppose but that this green girl was flattered and secretly pleased to find a second lover now that the first was gone? That she did not deeply regret the loss of that first lover was evident, not only from what she said, but by the absence from her face of those signs of grief which might have been expected there after the late parting. But unless she were so thoroughly worldly as to reckon already on Eugenius being heir to the Godwin estate, she could have no serious thought of accepting his addresses. Certainly she had encouraged him to speak as he had, but probably she had done so without any premeditation whatever, and solely under the coquettish impulse of the moment. Or she might be so simple—and the supposition was not absurd considering how little she had seen of the world—that she merely looked upon him as an amusing friend, and considered

that a friendship, and nothing more, could exist between them as it existed between her and Mr. Tickel. These thoughts must have passed through the mind of Eugenius, for when he spoke it was with that caution which such conclusions would dictate.

“Miss Liston,” he said, “I beg you to regard me simply as an humble friend. I spoke of higher hopes, but, believe me, they shall never again be referred to unless some unexpected turn of fortune gives me the right to encourage them.”

“Thank you,” said Lydia; “I am to blame. I speak too often without reflection, as if I were still a schoolgirl; and it seemed so natural to welcome you as a friend when I so felt the need of one. It is so dull here. My aunt and Mr. Tickel don’t care for music, or poetry and literature, and I don’t care very much for eating and drinking, so there is but little

sympathy between us ; and we know absolutely no one else in London. And I do like human beings. And when one is all alone one thinks of absent friends. I felt as if I must cry once or twice when I thought of poor Mr. Godwin."

"You saw him on Friday?"

"Yes ; he looked so funny in his tall hat and red coat. It was so odd to see him, who used to be so particular about his appearance, dressed just the same as the other soldiers. Of course I couldn't help crying a little when I saw him marching away ; but the music was very cheerful and lively. Poor Mr. Tickel was dreadfully dull afterwards. He spoke scarcely a word all the way to London."

"That did not help to diminish your grief."

"No ; and what added considerably to it was the behaviour of Miss Davenant and Captain Davenant."

“ Ah! you met them? ”

“ We passed close by them in the street at Woolwich. You know how fond I am of Miss Davenant? ”

“ Mrs. Romsey told me that you became strongly attached to her during their brief stay in London. ”

“ Oh, you cannot tell how fond I was of her. She is such a sweet, soft, pretty little lady; and she seemed equally fond of me. Well, can you believe it, she would not acknowledge my bow? Captain Davenant saluted us in his stately manner, but his daughter looked in my face and passed as though she had never before seen me. Was not that cruel? ”

“ It seems to me unkind and unjust. ”

“ Of course Mr. Godwin would not have enlisted had I accepted his offer of marriage; and so in a certain sense I am the cause of this unhappiness. But how could I accept a husband without money and

without expectations? It seemed to me as if I was losing all my friends, and through no actual fault of my own; and I had looked with such pleasure to spending a few weeks at Redwater next month. Now that is of course out of the question."

"You are very fond of the country?"

"Extremely; and in a few weeks the wild flowers will be plentiful. A woman passed this morning with a basket of primroses. Miss Davenant said that the country about Redwater is beautiful; but Mr. Godwin declared it is still more lovely around the Moat."

"I think Mr. Godwin was right."

Lydia sighed, and looked across at the unpromising park.

"I don't think I shall be able to stay in London when the days grow bright," she said.

"You have a house at Exeter, have you not?"

“Yes; but Exeter itself is as dull as London, and the people there are so stupid and uninteresting.” The hint was broad enough; but its significance was redeemed by the admirable simplicity with which it was given.

“What you suggest, Miss Liston, is very true,” said Eugenius. “A generous mind is incapable of obtaining the full enjoyment of Nature or Art in solitude or unsympathetic company.”

“That is just what I thought as I was playing one of the preludes before you came.”

“Does not Mrs. Romsey like the fugues?”

“They send her to sleep; and that is the only charm Bach has for her,” she laughed. “I am beginning to feel happy again,” she said. “Will you play to me?”

With a very gracious bow he rose and

went to the piano. Lydia took a seat at some distance from the player, but commanding a profile view of his face. As usual Eugenius played from memory, and also as usual he seemed to lose himself in a musician's ecstasy, and to be oblivious of Lydia's fixed regard. With his meagre body thrown back, his long arms extended, his eyes closed, and his face turned upwards in rapture, he looked as if he were posing for a mediæval picture.

"That is very beautiful," said Lydia when Eugenius had concluded his musical and picturesque performance.

"It is still more admirable played on the organ, for which instrument Bach composed it."

"Do you play the organ?"

"Yes. There is a small organ in the chapel at the Moat."

"How I should like to hear it. Does Lady Godwin like music?"

“She adores it. She is herself a musician.”

“Oh, how I wish I knew her!”

“That is a wish which she would be only too glad to gratify.”

“Do you think she would like me?”

“She would not be my mother if she did not share the sentiment which is part of my nature,” Eugenius murmured with fervour.

“Play to me again,” said Lydia softly.

Eugenius turned again to the piano with an unwonted flush in his face; and for some time he played with little expression and without attitudinising. The arrival of Mr. Tickel, and the consequent awaking of Mrs. Romsey, precluded further progress; but Lydia was well content with what had passed.

Mr. Tickel was less satisfied. He shook his head when Lydia had given him a faithful account of what had been said.

“You’re running too quickly, my dear young lady,” he said, “and a stumble will lose you the race. Those hints of yours were ingenious enough, but they’re too open to escape suspicion. ‘Why did she fish for an invitation to the Moat,’ he’ll ask himself; and then he will divine your motive or I am a Dutchman.”

“No he won’t,” said Lydia with quiet decision.

“And may I ask why he won’t?” asked the parson.

“Because he believes I am in love with him.”

“I don’t see how you are to know that, my dear.”

“Perhaps not,” said Lydia, with a smile; “but if you were a woman, it is possible you would.”

“I’ll grant witchcraft to every one with an eye like yours, you pretty rogue. Well, I hope you are right in your divination.

for if it be as you say you may twist my young gentleman round your finger."

In the following week Blase, with his regiment, was despatched to Dublin—a rising of the disaffected Irish being expected—and from the barracks there he sent a letter to Mr. Tickel.

"There was nothing inside for me?" said Lydia timidly, when Mr. Tickel told her that he had received the letter.

"Not a scrap," said the parson in a tone of satisfaction.

Lydia sighed.

"Why, surely, my dear, you did not expect a letter?"

"I—I—half hoped," Lydia replied with hesitation as she looked wistfully at her fingers, which she was twining together in her lap.

"He wouldn't be the honest gentleman we take him for if he had writ to you," said Mr. Tickel. "'Twas a womanly weak-

ness in you to see him again after it was known that you could never be his wife ; but 'tis not in Blase to take advantage of that weakness for the selfish gratification of sustaining your hopeless love."

" 'Twould have been like a woman to write after such a parting, wouldn't it ?

" Of course it would, my dear."

" Then I am glad there's nothing for me," she cried with pretty emphasis. Then dropping her voice to soft persuasive tones, " But you can show me his letter, can't you ? "

" Well, I don't know that I can very readily ; for you see Blase has a knack of speaking his mind pretty plainly when he's in choler, and these Irish ruffians have moved him to use a few words not exactly fit for a young lady to read."

" I don't want to know anything about the Irish ; I can skip that part, or you can turn down the letter where it is objectionable."

“Well, I’ll see. There’s a bit at the end about Eugenius that isn’t altogether what you would find in your ‘Polite Letter Writer.’ But ’tis a good manly letter for all that; and I don’t know but that a few rough words are more fit for your reading than the innuendoes and covert meanings with which less honest writers sprinkle their letters, and so I think I’ll let you have the letter to read or skip as you will, my dear. There’s not a word of maudlin sentiment, or sickly repining, or the like; he bears his burden like a man, and, by George, I find more beauty in his plain prose than in all the stuff of poetry that was ever hashed up.”

Lydia drew her chair a little closer to Mr. Tickel.

“Have you that letter in your pocket?” she asked in a coaxing tone.

“No, my dear; but I’ll not forget to bring it to-morrow. There is one item of

news that is curious, though not unexpected, which we'll discuss at the first conveniency. But hither comes your good aunt, so no more on the subject just now."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH LYDIA UNDERTAKES A DESPERATE
VENTURE.

MR. TICKEL was seated in his favourite stall at Welsh's, smoking his afternoon pipe, and complacently reading the day's news, when Hutchins came to his side, hat in hand, and attracted his attention by a modest cough.

"Ha! my good man, and what do you want?" asked the parson.

"If you please, sir, two visitors have called—Mr. Eugenius and Miss Liston's maid. They both left letters for you, but Miss Liston's maid said hers must be given to you at once, and so——"

"Well, where are they?"

Hutchins extended his hat in which he had placed the letters, for the fellow was very nice in the etiquette of his office.

Mr. Tickel opened Lydia's letter. It was brief :

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Will you have the goodness to come to me at once? You will find me in the King's Walk.

“LYDIA LISTON.”

Mr. Tickel rose at once from his seat.

“Does the maid await an answer?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

“Very good; you may go.”

The parson took his hat and stick, thrust the note from Eugenius in his pocket unread, left the coffee-house, and stepping into a coach bade the driver carry him to the King's Walk, St. James's Park.

There he quickly descried the graceful figure of Lydia walking with her maid. She came hastily to meet the parson, the maid falling back a dozen yards in her rear.

“It is very good of you to come so speedily,” said Lydia.

“To tell you the truth, my dear, I feared something ill had befallen you; but I am glad to see by the expression of your face that my fears are ungrounded.”

“No, I am quite well, and nothing serious has happened—at least, so I hope. But I am perplexed.”

“Take my arm, my dear. Now tell me what perplexes you.”

“Have you seen Mr. Eugenius to-day?”

“No; but I have a note from him, now I think on’t, in my pocket.”

“What does he say?”

“I’ll tell you in a moment.” The parson

found the letter, opened it, and read aloud :—

“ DEAR MR. TICKEL,

“ I am compelled to return summarily to Godwin’s Moat, and, as my business will not permit of delay, I beg you to accept this as an apology for not awaiting your return to take leave of you personally. I quit town at once, but shall take the very earliest opportunity of writing to you more fully.

“ I am, my dear Mr. Tickel,

“ Your most obedient humble servant,

“ EUGENIUS.”

“ Why on earth has he gone away in such a hurry ? ” Mr. Tickel asked when he had finished the letter.

“ Sir Gilbert Godwin is ill.”

“ Ha ! Eugenius has called upon you ? ”

“ This morning ; and Sir Gilbert’s ill health is the cause of this departure. Mr.

Tickel, has he ever spoken to you of Sir Gilbert being ill?"

"Not a word, my dear."

"Do you think he told Blase?"

"I'll take my oath he didn't, or Blase would have told me. Besides——" Mr. Tickel stopped short.

"What were you about to say?"

"If Blase had known his father was ill, he would have forgiven every wrong he has suffered, and would not have gone away without seeing him once more."

"That was what I thought."

"And another thing, if I had suspected such a thing I should not have been fool enough to urge him into signing that paper. What is the matter with the baronet?"

Eugenius described his affection as a paralysis.

"Great Heavens! a palsy! Why 'tis a disease in nine cases out of ten fatal! When was he struck?"

“ At the beginning of the year.”

“ And why was not Blase told of this ? ”

“ I could not ask that. I dared not even ask if he had been told.”

“ ’Twere all one had you asked. I warrant the cunning rascal had a plausible reason at the end of his tongue ready if reply was needed. Consideration for Blase, or some such wicked falsehood. Hey ! we know this Eugenius for a villain now, whatever doubt he may have imposed upon us hitherto. For look you, my dear, the fact is not divulged until Blase is in Ireland, and unable to go to his father. It was known to this wretch weeks before he forced Blase to sign away his patrimony. That concealment is nothing less than an iniquitous fraud.”

“ Would Blase be compelled, even by a sense of honour, to fulfil a promise made under such conditions ? ”

Mr. Tickel, who under the influence of

his indignation had been striding along at such a pace that Lydia could scarcely keep up with him, stopped abruptly, as if a barrier had been thrown across the path.

“My child,” he said, turning to Lydia, “the promise is fulfilled.”

“Fulfilled! When?”

“Let us sit down on this seat. The villainy grows clearer and clearer. I told you there was news in the letter not unexpected but strange enough. Here is the letter, and here the passage, look.”

He put the letter he had received from Blase into Lydia's trembling hands, and pointed to the passage:

“The vultures have lost no time in scenting me out. Since writing the above I have been called upon by a little gentleman of the law, whose face was yet green from the effects of sea-sickness, with a deed of conveyance which only needed my signature to disinherit me. He told me very

civilly that he had come by way of Milford, and had set out the moment he learnt that our regiment had embarked at Chatham for Dublin in order to reach me before any fighting took place. I signed it, and he said that he should not have to trouble me any more ; to which I replied Amen very heartily, and thank God there's an end of that business."

"Thank God there is not an end of that business !" cried Lydia, when she had read the passage, springing to her feet as she spoke.

Mr. Tickel rose with a despondent sigh, and drew the girl's hand through his arm in silence. His indignation had given way to a feeling of utter helplessness.

"I don't for the life of me see what we can do now," he said. "This sudden departure of Eugenius signifies that some grave change has taken place in the condition of Sir Gilbert Godwin. He would

not have told you of his past illness, but that he thought it necessary to prepare you for the news of his death, and the revelation of previous illness which must then leak out. A second stroke of the palsy is nearly always fatal. The villains may only have kept the old man alive during the delay of the law, and now that the conveyance is signed, they will put an end to his life as they did to the life of Lady Godwin. Gads me, his life isn't worth a week's purchase."

"Then we must act immediately."

"We! My dear child, what power have we against such enemies? How can we undo what they have done?"

"We don't know that they have done anything yet beyond securing the signature of this deed. It is not certain that Sir Gilbert has made a will. The precautions they have taken to conceal the illness until Blase was incapable of seeing

his father—does that not suggest that they are still doubtful of his intentions towards them ? ”

“ There is something in that truly. But how are we to get at the baronet ? ”

“ By going to the Moat.”

“ I expect there are doors to the house, my dear ; and if Lady Godwin chooses to keep them shut, I don’t see how we’re to make her open them.”

“ That is a matter for secondary consideration. The first thing is to get there. When does the coach start ? ”

“ My dear, dear child,” Mr. Tickel said in a soothing tone, “ think but a moment, and you will see that the notion of starting off at a moment’s notice for Godwin’s Moat without any invitation or plausible pretext for the invasion is perfectly ridiculous.”

“ And what then ? ” asked Lydia.

“ What then, my dear ? ” echoed the parson in a feeble tone of bewilderment.

“Yes; what then? Supposing it *is* a ridiculous notion, is that any reason why we should do nothing at all? You are no friend to Blase, and you are no friend of mine!” she said angrily, withdrawing her hand from Mr. Tickel’s arm.

“Upon my soul, you do me wrong,” said Mr. Tickel with emotion.

“Then why do you throw difficulties in the way? If the only chance we have of saving Blase is weak ’tis your duty to strengthen it. Are *you* afraid of ridicule?”

“Not I,” Mr. Tickel affirmed stoutly.

“Nor am I. So we will make this attempt, however ridiculous it may be. Now take me to the booking-office, and we will secure seats in the coach.”

Mr. Tickel obeyed with the best grace he could assume; but he was very far from sharing in Lydia’s heroic recklessness. She inherited daring from her father, and

her courage rose with the danger—his sank.

“’Tis a forlorn hope,” thought he ; and certainly he was not by nature the sort of man who would have volunteered for such a service.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE ATTACKING PARTY SETS OUT.

THERE was not a seat in the coach to be had for the next day, but only two insides were taken for Thursday. The delay was unavoidable, so Lydia paid the deposit and secured five seats—two in and three out.

“You will take Hutchins, and I shall take my maid,” said Lydia.

“And the fifth place is for Mrs. Romsey, if she will go,” Mr. Tickel observed.

“I daresay she will make a thousand objections, but—she will go,” Lydia replied with decision.

And in effect Mrs. Romsey did make a thousand objections.

“My beloved Lydia,” she cried, when Lydia had announced her intention of leaving London on Thursday morning, “What are you thinking about? Going into the country at this season, when the roads are knee deep in mud, and the weather is so variable that one is afraid to leave off winter clothing, not to mention those dreadful highwaymen who think nothing of stopping a coach in broad daylight. And anything more dreary and uncomfortable than the country before the month of June it is impossible to imagine; besides which we have never been introduced to Lady Godwin, and to visit her without an invitation would be quite impossible, especially when Sir Gilbert is an invalid. And the house being surrounded by water, as Mr. Eugenius assured me it is, and as we’ve only known him for some weeks, it will really look as though you were following him for fear he might fix

his affections elsewhere—conduct, my love, which I wonder you yourself do not shrink from as being open to a suspicion of indelicacy. So that the rooms, as I say, must be damp, and you know what a horror I have, Lydia, of linen that is not thoroughly aired. And after all, if we get there safe and sound—which is quite a question, for a coach turned over and a stout lady and the guard were most seriously injured on the Sevenoaks road only the day before yesterday—if, as I say, we have the good fortune to reach the Moat uninjured, and Lady Godwin does not invite us to stay, what *are* we to do but to turn round and go back to some inn where they may be quite unprepared for visitors, and have nothing in the house but ham and eggs, which I detest.”

“If I am not received at the Moat I shall go on to Redwater.”

“Redwater, Lydia? Why, this is worse

and worse. You yourself wrote to put off our visit there, and your suggestion was accepted in that very cold letter which Miss Davenant sent by return post; besides which you told me that Miss Davenant did not acknowledge your bow when you passed at Woolwich; and as they did not call upon us, though they must have stayed in town that night, it is clear that they cherish an ill-feeling towards us."

"That is a good reason for visiting them, since the ill feeling is unmerited. And I am certain they will not refuse us hospitality when they know what I have to tell them."

"I would sooner stay at an inn, for you know what Mr. Tickel has told me about their table. And after all, Lydia, why should you want to go against all these adverse conditions?"

"I must go, aunt. I cannot stay in London. Attribute my purpose to what

you will—a caprice, ill-health, anything. You said when I came in that I looked like a ghost; you have told me every day for weeks that I look thin and white. I *am* ill. Loss of friends, or the effect of this thick atmosphere, makes me so; and I must have friends or a purer air to restore me to peace. Say it is so, or say that it is but the waywardness of a spoilt child; but let me have my way.”

Mrs. Romsey sighed bitterly, and cast her eyes upwards as much as to ask of Heaven what she had done to deserve so much trouble.

“If it is painful to you to travel,” continued Lydia, “do not go. I shall take my maid, and I shall feel quite safe under Mr. Tickel’s protection.”

“Will he go?”

“He has promised.”

“And do you wish me to stay here with not a soul to keep me company?”

“I would very much prefer you to accompany me.” Lydia put her arm about the full waist of her aunt, and in her soft, coaxing manner said: “Come dear, it will not be so terrible as you think. You shall write one of your nice little letters to Mr. Eugenius that will ensure our reception at the Moat, where I am sure everything will be done to ensure your comfort.”

“What can *I* say, my love?”

“I will tell you,” and quick as thought Lydia got a sheet of paper and a pen and wrote a copy of the “nice little letter” her aunt was to send.

“There, aunt, I think that will do,” she said, handing the paper to Mrs. Romsey.

Mrs. Romsey put up her glass and read aloud, with a running commentary—

“‘My dear Mr. Eugenius,—You will doubtless be surprised to hear that we are about to leave London for awhile.’ I should think he would indeed. ‘My dear

niece, Lydia, has, as you may be aware, taken deeply to heart Miss Davenant's cruel resentment of her unavoidable action in refusing the offer of Mr. Godwin's hand. Her spirits'—Ah, I shall put in there what my opinion is upon that subject. 'Her spirits have been very low all this afternoon, indeed ever since your departure this morning; for having no friends to distract her thoughts, she broods upon the loss of Miss Davenant's affection, which she prizes to an inordinate degree.' That is exceedingly true. 'As there is nothing to detain us in town, and as I think her suffering arises as much from the need of pure air and active exercise as from an affection of the sentiments, I have suggested to her the advisability of seeking a personal interview with Miss Davenant.' Why, my love, *I* suggested nothing of the kind."

"No, but you would, auntie, had you

known how necessary it was to my happiness. Besides, it sounds so much better, and one is always allowed a little license in letter writing."

"Well, well, where was I? Ah! 'Miss Davenant; and she has accepted the proposal with readiness. We shall leave London by the early coach on Thursday, Mr. Tickel having kindly offered to accompany us, and I hope we shall have but little difficulty in finding our way safely to Redwater. We shall break the journey at Basingstoke on Thursday, and on Friday at Denham, where we shall lie at the inn near the cross-roads.' How do you know there is an inn by the cross roads, Lydia?"

"Mr. Tickel says there is an excellent inn there?"

"I had better say so. 'Cross roads, and the following morning we intend to give ourselves the pleasure of calling upon you in the hope of hearing a favourable account

of Sir Gilbert Godwin's health.' Ah, my love, I think I shall insert a few lines to the effect that having heard from Mr. Tickel that we must pass the Moat on our way to Redwater, we shall feel it our duty as it is our inclination to pay our respects to Lady Godwin."

"Capital! That is exactly what was wanting in my letter; but you always did write elegantly!" said the sly flatterer, kissing her dupe's cheek.

"'Tis an accomplishment which is becoming shamefully neglected in the education of young women. I think with a few additions the letter will do. Lady Godwin cannot do otherwise than invite us to stay a few days; and better the Moat than Redwater, if we must go to one or the other."

"And we must," said Lydia, setting a desk on the table and opening it. "The letter is perfectly true in substance. I must have an explanation with Miss

Davenant, unless my thoughts are diverted by the company we shall find at Godwin's Moat. Will you sit down and write the letter now, dear? Then it shall be sent to the booking-office, to be carried by the coach to-morrow."

Mrs. Romsey sat down at once to her task with a feeling that, after all, the expedition might end more pleasantly than at first sight it promised.

This also was the feeling of Mr. Tickel, when he heard from Lydia of the letter and its contents.

"That was a famous notion of yours, my dear," he said; "for the more reason they have to fear intervention, the more strongly will they desire to keep us at the Moat. For if the news were carried to Redwater, Captain Davenant might insist upon seeing Sir Gilbert in behalf of Blase. No, I don't see how they will be able to keep us out of the Moat."

“And once in the house, the victory is more than half won,” Lydia said, unconsciously striking a valorous little attitude.

“I’ll stake my life you win it wholly, you brave little beauty, if it be mortally possible,” cried Mr. Tickel, thrilled with admiration.

Nothing occurred to delay their departure; and on Thursday morning the party left London. A bright sky and a soft air put every one in good humour; but this April aspect of nature was regarded by Lydia, who was not too wise to be superstitious, as nothing less than a propitious omen. She seemed to feel that the heavens were smiling upon her undertaking. Nor was the weather less auspicious when they left Basingstoke the following day by the Exeter coach. She rode on the outside with Mr. Tickel; and as they passed through the pleasant country, which was everywhere gay with young life, the parson

told her how half a year back he had travelled this very road with Blase.

“Then, my dear,” he said, “’twas a season in which I failed to see any beauty. ’Twas wretched cold; the cattle cowered under the naked hedges; leaves were falling; acorns and chestnuts littered the road; and the banks were a mass of tangled, faded rubbish, and everywhere was dissolution and decay! What wonder if the heart grew melancholy at the hopeless prospect. But now the temperature is kindly; the woods are besprinkled with a pleasant green; I know not how many young lambs we have counted skipping in the meadows; the banks are patched with primroses and such like herbs, and all around one sees the earnest of Nature’s sweet and bountiful intentions. And thus, my dear, I note a change for the better, not only in the landscape that I saw six months ago, but likewise in the companion who sat

beside me then. The old life is dead, and a new life has sprung up—a strong and pure and healthy young life, whose ripe perfection I shall live to see, please God.”

Lydia slipped her hand under the parson's arm and pressed it for reply. They were both silent for a while, and then Mr. Tickel said, looking to the right and left :

“If I mistake not, 'tis somewhere near here we stopped ; and over thereabouts should be that excellent inn I have spoken to you about. Can your young eyes see any signs of it, my dear ?”

“I can see a man standing in the middle of the road, down there.”

“Hum ! I don't think the inn can be anywhere near there, for were it so the man would certainly not be standing in the road—if he be of my way of thinking.”

“I think it is Mr. Eugenius,” said Lydia, with excitement. “I am sure it is ! And there is a chariot drawn up by the side of

the road. Oh, if he has come to carry us to the Moat at once !”

“ Ah !” said Mr. Tickel gravely ; for considering that this arrangement would necessarily postpone the hour of dinner, he could not participate in the feeling of unmingled satisfaction with which Lydia regarded it.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE PARTY WERE RECEIVED AT
GODWIN'S MOAT.

LYDIA was not disappointed ; Eugenius had come to meet them, and to take them at once to Godwin's Moat.

“Lady Godwin is sensible of your great kindness in promising to visit her,” he said, “and she begs that you will accept her hospitality so long as it is agreeable or convenient to you to stay in this neighbourhood. She is impatient to see you, and will not forgive me if I return alone.”

Mrs. Romsey replied to this formal speech, which was in courtesy addressed to her, by declaring that Lady Godwin was prodigiously kind, but that she could not

think of making more than a passing call upon her unless she were assured that Sir Gilbert's health would allow of the presence of visitors at the Moat.

"I beg you, madam," replied Eugenius, "to set your mind perfectly at rest in that regard. The indisposition which so alarmed Lady Godwin—for she took it to be a return of his previous malady—is found to be nothing more serious than a fugitive distemper arising from the acrid humours which a few days' care will doubtless remove."

"In that case, sir, I shall have a greater pleasure than I anticipated in being your mamma's guest," said Mrs. Romsey, with her most gracious courtesy.

Lydia's satisfaction in hearing this account of Sir Gilbert's condition was unfeigned, and, as Eugenius led Mrs. Romsey to the chariot, she shot a glance from her sparkling eyes at Mr. Tickel, who

replied by a look cautioning her to be discreet.

A cart was waiting to follow with the servants and the baggage; and when Eugenius had given the necessary instructions, he took his place beside Mr. Tickel, on the front seat, and the carriage started off.

“I trust, Miss Liston,” said Eugenius to the young lady who faced him, “that you no longer suffer from the depression of spirits which I heard of with so much anxiety.”

“Oh, I am cured already,” answered Lydia gaily. “The fresh air, and the excitement of travelling, and recovering a lost friend, have combined to work a marvel. Do I look unhappy?” And she smiled in the young man’s face, and so bewitched him with her wonderful eyes, that, instead of replying with the elegant compliment he wished to make, he returned only such an incomprehensible answer as

Blase or any other susceptible young man in the same position would have stammered out.

“I am so glad Sir Gilbert is better,” said Lydia, “for his own sake, and yours, of course, but for my own as well,” she laughed. “If he had been seriously ill we could only have made a formal call, and that would have been only to whet my already sharp set curiosity, and leave my dearest wishes ungratified. But now, I hope, before we go to Redwater, to explore the romantic old house that Mr. Godwin has described to me, from end to end.”

“You will find us very unwilling to satisfy your curiosity if that alone is to keep you with us.”

“I did not say that curiosity alone would keep me your guest.”

Lydia spoke in a low tone; and as the rumbling of the chariot made hearing difficult, the heads of the speakers were

necessarily brought pretty close together. Noting this fact, and that the lean face of Eugenius wore an expression of unwonted animation, Mrs. Romsey thought it proper to look out of the window, and call Mr. Tickel's attention to the bank by the roadside which cut off all view of the country. But Mr. Tickel was not willing to let matters go on so quickly ; and because he saw through Lydia's artifice, he imagined that Eugenius also would detect the motive of her excessive amiability, for he had settled in his mind that Eugenius was a cunning rascal, and he could not perceive that even a cunning rascal may have the human weaknesses of his more simple fellow creatures. So having replied briefly to Mrs. Romsey's enthusiastic comments upon the beauty of the country, he turned to Eugenius, and said :

“ Sir Gilbert is able to get about again I suppose, sir ? ”

“He is not confined to his bed,” replied Eugenius. “But it can scarcely be said that he can get about. He has not been able to move without assistance since his first illness. He has lost almost entirely the use of his limbs upon the left side.”

“’Tis curious that Mr. Godwin told me nothing of this, Mr. Eugenius.”

“I purposely refrained from telling him, sir. It had been a heartless cruelty to add to those troubles which already overwhelmed him.”

“I do not for a moment doubt the generosity of your sentiments,” replied Mr. Tickel; “but I’m of opinion that you allowed your feelings to unduly influence your judgment. For it seems to me that Blase ought to have been told of his father’s disorder to the end that he might perform his filial duty, and seek a reconciliation with Sir Gilbert, while it was yet possible. ’Tis a terrible thing, sir, for a

son to know that he can never acquit his conscience of obdurate disobedience to paternal authority."

"Your remarks are very just; and I beg you to believe that I did not overlook these important considerations. But, alas! sir, a reconciliation was impossible; for Sir Gilbert declared he would neither see nor hear his son again. If letters came from Mr. Godwin they were to be destroyed, and the doors of the house were to be closed against him if he came to the Moat in person."

"That alters the case," said the parson.

"For my part," said Mrs. Romsey, "I consider, Mr. Eugenius, that you acted with perfect consideration and propriety; and if every one were like you the world would be much happier than it is, for one half of what we suffer arises from our knowledge of other people's misfortunes." The good lady enlarged upon this subject

with great volubility, and as she addressed her observations to the gentlemen on the opposite seat, Lydia reclined in her corner and gave herself up to speculating on the possible issue of her venture.

A girl with half her wit would have perceived the hold she had upon Eugenius, and that hold she determined to maintain, for through him her visit at the Moat was to be prolonged. She expected to be narrowly watched by Lady Godwin and Father Dominick, but she felt tolerably certain that she should be able to elude their vigilance, sooner or later. It was but a question of time and strategy. She must meet Sir Gilbert at the table, and she trusted to her ingenuity to contrive an occasion for speaking to him privately. If no better means were presented, she would one day boldly ask him to give her a private interview, and if this was denied her she would speak before her enemies and

tell what she knew, and then seek the assistance of Captain Davenant, or even make an appeal to the law. It was still light when they came in sight of the grey walls and pointed gables of Godwin's Moat. At their approach the great gates were thrown open, and the chariot crossing the moat by the bridge, passed under the watch-tower and drew up in the quadrangle before the entrance to the dining-hall.

Father Dominick and Lady Godwin stood upon the steps to receive them.

When the usual commonplaces had been exchanged, Lady Godwin conducted the ladies upstairs to adjoining rooms, which had been prepared for their reception, and Father Dominick led Mr. Tickel into the great dining-room, where the table was laid for dinner, and a great fire blazed upon the hearth. Mr. Tickel rubbed his hands cheerfully as he approached the fire

and eyed the table. There were high-backed oak settles on either side of the chimney, and a great chair was placed in front; but the seats were empty. Sir Gilbert was not in the hall.

“You and I can scarcely be called strangers,” said Father Dominick, as he seated himself opposite to Mr. Tickel.

“No, sir,” replied the parson; “indeed I took the liberty to regard you as an old friend; for I do not forget that I owe to you my acquaintance with Mr. Godwin, and the affection that has sprung from that connection.”

“Your affection for Mr. Godwin does not extend to sharing his antipathies, I hope?” Father Dominick spoke with measured slowness, leaning his elbow on the arm of the settle and his lean cheek against his fore-finger, whilst his deep-set eyes fixed upon Mr. Tickel’s face, read the expression there.

“My presence here must convince you of that, sir. His prejudice has ever been inimical to his interests, and as my welfare and his were closely bound together, you may readily conceive that I never regarded it with favour. I would have had him take the offer made by Sir Gilbert six months ago, and I implored him to accept my mediation; but he would not listen to reason. The fellow is young and hot tempered, and high spirited, but there’s no more harm in him than there is in that loaf of bread upon the table. He’ll need no prompting of mine to ask your pardon for the injustice he has done you; for he will outlive his faults if some cursed bullet doesn’t cut short his existence.”

“Have you heard from him lately?”

“I had a letter from him the morning I left town, sir; two words to tell me of his safe arrival at Dublin.”

Father Dominick raised himself from his

observant attitude and turned the conversation upon the state of Ireland and the probabilities of an insurrection.

Lady Godwin presently descended with her guests, and at her request the company seated themselves at the table. In entering the room Lydia had glanced round, expecting to find Sir Gilbert. There was a chair at the head of the table which she supposed was placed there for him, but now Lady Godwin took this seat. Lydia looked across the table at Mr. Tickel.

“I hope you are not greatly fatigued with your journey,” the parson said blandly in response to this look, for he felt that Father Dominick was observing him.

“Are we not to have the pleasure of seeing Sir Gilbert at dinner to-day, madam?” said Mrs. Romsey.

“Oh no. Unfortunately Sir Gilbert is such an invalid that he never dines with us now,” replied Lady Godwin.

“I consider he is very wise ; it is so much more comfortable for sick people to take their meals unobserved.” Mrs. Romsey had felt that the sight of an invalid at the table would considerably lessen her own enjoyment.

“My husband,” continued Lady Godwin, “never quits his own set of apartments. Since his attack he has taken a strange aversion to society ; he will see no one. And to this rule I am afraid he will make no exception even in honour of my present guests.”

“I hope, madam,” said Mr. Tickel readily, for he felt that Father Dominick’s eyes were again upon him, “that you will enable us to forget the loss we suffer in his absence by giving us the pleasure of your society.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE TERRORS OF THE MOATED HOUSE.

THE announcement made by Lady Godwin was a rude check to Lydia's expectations, and she found it difficult to conceal her mortification and appear at ease. A new plan of action must be made, and fresh measures concerted with Mr. Tickel. But how was a private conference with him to be obtained? Eugenius never left her side the whole evening; that was not unnatural, perhaps, but it seemed to her that her intentions had been foreseen and that the young man was posted by her to prevent any communication with Mr. Tickel. It is easy to be cheerful when one is playing a

winning hand, but only a cool and practised player can see his best cards trumped with equanimity, and maintain a perfect appearance of good will towards the triumphant adversary. Lydia had never before felt such a decided hatred for Eugenius, and feeling that she could not even pretend to like him with any resemblance to truth, she wisely assumed an air of fatigue as an excuse for her coldness and silence.

Lydia's silence was not less noticeable than that of Mrs. Romsey, upon whose mind uneasy doubts and vague apprehensions had been growing since the conclusion of dinner. She knew nothing of the tragical event that had taken place in the house, but the antiquity of the building, its complete isolation, and above all, the mystery that surrounded the people in it, excited indefinite fears which were augmented by the saturnine face and stealthy

manners of Father Dominick, who devoted himself to her entertainment.

It was a great relief to her, as it was also to Lydia, when Lady Godwin, disengaging herself from a conversation with Mr. Tickel—who alone had maintained his habitual liveliness—proposed that the ladies should seek the repose so much needed after the fatigue of travelling.

“Well, Lydia,” said Mrs. Romsey, when they were alone in that lady’s bedchamber, “what do *you* think of our hosts?”

“They are very hospitable, and clearly they are doing their utmost to make us comfortable.”

“Yes—but do you like them?”

“I think it is too soon to answer that question,” said Lydia evasively.

“*I* don’t, my love; and I can tell you candidly that I like neither the house nor the folks in it. It does not take me long to find out the value of people and things.

Lady Godwin is excessively coarse and common and vulgar; and one might as well be in a ship at sea, for there's water all round, and the floors are so uneven that I felt quite nervous in passing the windows in that horrid corridor, and if anything were to happen one might scream in vain for help. I think her arms and neck are perfectly indelicate, and if I were of her age I should take more pains to conceal them than to display them. There are too many corners to please me, and what with the corridors, and four houses as it were put end to end in the form of a square, with a chapel on one side and a tower on the other, and a dining-room with the roof showing, 'tis more like an almshouse or a public institution than anything else. What Mr. Tickel can find to admire I cannot say, and I am surprised at his bad taste, for he has done nothing but talk to her all the evening, and I feel sure from

the way in which she laughed—did you ever hear anything more unladylike and loud in all your life?—that he was telling her something impudent. I should not be surprised if there were rats and mice, Lydia; but what astounded me the very moment I saw them, was the astonishing resemblance between Father Dominick and Mr. Eugenius, and never in my life was I more deceived than I have been by him.”

“I do not see in what he has deceived you. He told us long ago that he bore a most unfortunate resemblance to Father Dominick.”

“I allude, my dear Lydia, to his parentage. He led me to believe that he was the son of Lady Godwin by a former marriage.”

“I don’t think he ever said so.”

“No, but he never said he wasn’t; and as to the likeness, I thought that was due to one of those accidents which occur to

married ladies, and of which you will know more when you are older. I have seen children marked in the most peculiar way, but for Eugenius to be marked with the identical features of Father Dominick is not to be accounted for by her having received a fright, though I protest he is capable of terrifying anyone to an extraordinary degree. His eyes, my love, and the manner in which he moves about, remind me of nothing but the serpent we saw at the tower. I happened to mention, at the beginning of the evening, the suicide that was committed in Hatton Garden last week, and he talked of suicide and nothing else until we rose to say good-night, and in such a cold-blooded calculating manner that my very flesh crept to hear him. There's a most cruel crafty look in his face, and you may be sure that there's more in the illness of Sir Gilbert Godwin than the priest wishes us to know,

or he wouldn't be shut up in one part of the house where no one can see him; and from what he said respecting the action of poison I should not be astonished if he were slowly killing the baronet for the sake of his money, especially now that poor dear Mr. Godwin is disinherited. Upon my word it did not strike me before, but now I feel thoroughly convinced that it must be so. I wish I had not thought of that, for I am sure I shall not be able to sleep a wink all night, for who knows but that we have been decoyed here to be slain in our beds."

"My dear aunt!" expostulated Lydia.

"I hope I may be wrong, though I can scarcely believe that I am. You'll look under your bed, and bolt the closets in your room, dear, and leave the between-door open, and if you hear any sound be sure and wake me, though as for that I am more likely to be awake than you."

Notwithstanding this prognostication the poor lady's head was scarcely laid upon the pillow before her heavy breathing showed that she was no longer conscious of the dangers which menaced her.

Lydia rose from the chair in which she had been sitting in deep abstraction during the concluding part of Mrs. Romsey's discourse, which was but an amplification of what has been recorded, and went into the adjoining room, where her maid was waiting to dress her hair for the night.

Lydia opened her window and looked out. It was so dark that for the first moment she thought she must be looking over the open country, and she leant forward and looked down thinking the waters of the moat must be below. Then a light from windows below falling on a stone pavement showed her that she was on the inner side of the building and looking into

the court-yard formed by the quadrangular construction of the house. The light on the ground-floor must be coming from the room she had left; this was proved by a hearty laugh that reached her ears, and which she knew at once to come from Mr. Tickel. And now, her eyes being more accustomed to the obscurity, she could make out against the starry sky the outline of the roofs before and on each side of her, and the square watch-tower rising from the centre of the wing upon her left. The building was in entire darkness, for the light from the room below was but a narrow shaft which escaped through a parting in the heavy curtains.

“Isn’t it a curious house, miss?” said the maid timidly, coming to Lydia’s side.

“Yes; have you been over it yet.”

“Oh! lor’ no miss; and I shouldn’t like to after dark; they say there’s been murders here, and ghostes, and all manner.”

“Who told you that?”

“The servants, miss.”

“How many servants are there?”

“Five—two maids, a nurse, a gardener, and a coachman.”

“Were they here when the murder took place?”

“Dear no, miss! Except the old gardener none of 'em's been here longer than three months, and the two maids less than that; and they says they won't stop, miss, for they say there'll be another murder, and that awful things goes on over there.”

“Where?”

“In the rooms over there.” She pointed across the court-yard. “There was a light there a little time ago, but it's gone. The maid pointed it out when she came up with me.”

“What goes on there?”

“High words, miss, and swearing, and

awful. The master's shut up there, and he's been heard to call out, "help! help!" in the middle of the night."

"Did the nurse hear this?"

"Lor'! no, miss. The nurse is stone deaf. It was the last servant as was here before Anne, the cook, who heard it."

"What does the nurse say to that?"

"She don't say nothing, miss; she don't know nothing. She never sees the baronet. No one ever sees him except the priest and Lady Godwin. The rooms all run into each other, as these do, and there's a corridor outside just the same. But the corridor doors is locked, and when the nurse goes in to make the bed the master is shut in another room. She's called a nurse, but she ain't a real nurse, miss; she only keeps the rooms in order, and fetches the baronet's meals from the kitchen, which is down there on the right hand side, because none of the servants is

ever allowed to enter that side of the house ; and the nurse keeps the only door that isn't screwed up shut fast, locking it when she comes out and when she goes in. Ah ! look, miss," she dropped her voice and pointed down to the court-yard, " there she goes. She's been down to the kitchen for something—her supper, perhaps."

Lydia looking down saw a woman, with a basket in one hand and a shaded light in the other, cross slowly from the wing on the right to the centre of the wing opposite, where she paused under an archway, and setting down her basket took a key that hung by a light chain from her waist and fitted it in the lock of a door opening laterally out of the covered way.

"The archway leads on to the garden ; there's a wooden bridge there," whispered the maid.

The woman opened the door and passed

through. Lydia heard the key turn, and a couple of minutes later a glimmer of light appeared in one of the windows opposite.

"That's her room," said the maid, still whispering.

A sense of awe not unmingled with terror kept Lydia at the window looking at the glimmering light as if some dreadful thing were about to happen. Would the silence be broken by a sudden cry for help? Would a light appear in another window, and some awful struggle be revealed in shadow upon the curtain?

"In the room alongside of that tower, miss, the murder was done," whispered the maid. "Oh!" she cried clinging to Lydia's arm with a sudden access of terror.

Lydia also made a quick movement of fear, her hair seeming to crisp up upon her head and her heart to stop beating with affright, for in that moment of silence

and vague expectancy of horrors the stroke of a bell in the tower telling the hour had fallen on her ear.

She closed the window hastily, and turned away ashamed of herself for participating the fears of her servant.

“You must take no notice of what the servants tell you,” she said. “Sir Gilbert Godwin is ill, and dislikes visitors; that accounts for everything. It’s very stupid to be frightened by idle stories,” Lydia said in a tone of reproof which she felt she had little right to use.

“Yes, miss. I’ll try not to be frightened any more. Will you have your hair dressed now, miss?”

Lydia sat down, and the maid uncoiled the rich tresses which falling in heavy waves nearly touched the floor.

“Do you know where Mr. Tickel’s servant is?” Lydia asked after some minutes of silence.

“Mr. Hutchins was in the servants’ hall, when Bessy the chamber-maid and I came away, miss.”

“Never mind my hair; get me a sheet of paper from the pocket of my valise and a pencil that you will see there.”

The maid found the paper and pencil and brought it to her mistress, who was still sitting in the chair wrapped in thought. Lydia threw her hair back over her shoulders drew her chair to the dressing-table and wrote :

“DEAR MR. TICKEL,

“I beg you to meet me at seven o’clock to-morrow morning in the garden.

“LYDIA.”

“Do you think you can give this note to Hutchins without being seen by the other servants?” she asked, as she folded the paper.

“I daresay I can, miss. I will pretend

I want him to show me where he put your valise, and so get him outside the room."

"Very good. Give him this, and tell him he is to let Mr. Tickel have it to-night, and bid him be careful that nobody but Mr. Tickel sees it or knows anything about it. Do you understand?"

"Quite well, miss."

"Take it at once. I shall not need you again to night. Go to bed, and come to me in the morning at half-past six—not later. There is no occasion for you to tell anyone that you are coming to me at that time."

"Oh, I'll take care no one shall know, miss. Good-night, miss."

"Good-night."

Lydia sat for some time in thought; then combing her hair she went to the window once more and looked out. The light still glimmered from the window on

the opposite side of the house, and the sound of mingled voices came up from the room below. She finished her preparations for the night with the unconscious haste of one whose mind dwells upon a course of speedy action; but before extinguishing the light she went round the room and carefully examined the fastenings of doors and closets to see that they were secure, for with all her bravery she was but a girl.

CHAPTER XII.

OF LYDIA'S IMPATIENCE AND MR. TICKEL'S
SAGACITY.

THE clock in the turret was striking six when Lydia woke the following morning. She sprang out of bed and went to the window, and her first glance was directed to the window opposite. The blinds were all drawn down; neither there nor in the courtyard below was there any sign of life or movement. She examined the building with curious interest and with the vain hope of discovering some means by which access might be obtained to the imprisoned baronet. She had fully made up her mind that he *was* imprisoned and not merely secluded by his own will. The building

opposite was of stone, and consisted of two floors with a long gabled roof. The upper story projected beyond the lower rooms in the style of early English domestic architecture, and was pierced with windows irregularly disposed. Reparations had been made without any regard to uniformity; some of the upper windows were fitted with leaden sashes and lozenge-formed panes of glass, others had more modern wooden sashes with small square panes. All the windows below were long and mullioned, and surmounted with the Tudor label mouldings. The only entrance from the court-yard was by the gateway in the centre leading to the garden, which she had seen the night before faintly illuminated by the light carried by the nurse.

Lydia had little hope that she could bribe that deaf servant into letting her through the guarded door. She had

greater expectations of finding some means of communication from the wings on the left or right of the side facing her.

She turned her eyes to the right, and at once recognized the flight of steps and the door at which they had been received by Father Dominick and Lady Godwin. On the left of the doorway she identified also the great window, divided by mullions into five parts, which gave light to the dining-hall. There could be no entrance from that part of the building. She looked to the left. That side of the house was distinguished by the watch-tower with the great gateway below. On the right of the entrance was a pointed Gothic window which Lydia concluded must appertain to the chapel. There might certainly be a way from that to the closed wing. That gave her hope. She would ask Eugenius to play the organ, and while he was at the instrument she

could use her eyes. She finished her observation of the building by a glance at that end of the wing on the left of the watch-tower. Here again the building was in two floors. The windows above as far as the range of vision went, were closed with shutters; below, a pair of large doors recently painted seemed to show that the ground-floor was now used as a coach-house; possibly this portion of the house had not been inhabited since the time when its principal room was stained with the blood of Sir Gilbert's first wife.

Lydia was dressed, when at half-past six her maid tapped gently at the door.

"You gave my note to Hutchins?" Lydia asked.

"Yes, miss, and nobody see me. Mr. Tickel didn't go to bed until twelve o'clock and past: but he told Mr. Hutchins to call him at twenty minutes to seven; but Mr. Hutchins says he don't know how

in the world he shall get his master up at that time."

"You did not let the servants know that you were to call me."

"No, miss. Lady Godwin told the servants they were on no account to disturb you, as you would be tired after your journey, and breakfast would not be served until late."

Lydia waited impatiently until the clock struck seven, and then she left her room, passed noiselessly along the narrow corridor which skirted the rooms on the outer side, and descended the stairs. A servant was dusting the room below.

"I want to walk in the garden!" said Lydia.

"If you will cross the court-yard and pass through the archway you will find the bridge, miss. The gardener has just gone through, so you will find the gate open."

Lydia followed these instructions. As she passed through the arched way she glanced at the door by which the nurse had entered. It was of dark wood, with long heavy hinges, and looked as if it had been made to resist a siege.

She had been in the garden five minutes when Mr. Tickel appeared with a very long face.

"I have risen at this untimely hour, my dear, because you desired it," he said, "but I think you are imprudent. It is quite enough to excite suspicion."

"Never mind that," said Lydia with impatience. "'Twill be easy to make an excuse. There was no other means of speaking to you privately."

"Well, my dear, and what have you to say?" asked the parson coldly.

Lydia told all that she had heard and seen since the night before.

"You see," she said in conclusion, "Sir

Gilbert is kept a prisoner that he may not communicate with those who might release him from his enemies."

"That is not evident," said Mr. Tickel. "If all that you have heard is true, there is nothing to prove that the baronet's seclusion is not voluntary, and that these precautions are not taken at his request. It is not surprising that he prefers to be waited upon by his wife, to the attendance of a stone-deaf nurse. His cries for help may be due to the lively imagination of a timid servant, or it may be that they were the very natural result of a helpless invalid finding himself in need of assistance."

It exasperated Lydia, who was burning with excitement, to listen to the cold objections of Mr. Tickel. Twice or thrice he stopped speaking to pick a flower from the border.

"Perhaps, sir," she said angrily, "you

have lost your inclination to help Blase, after profiting by the hospitality of his enemies."

"That conclusion, my dear," replied Mr. Tickel, bending down to pick a jonquil, "is I venture to think a little premature. When the time comes for action I don't think you will find me wanting in energy. If we are to succeed by strategy we must not let the enemies of Blase see that they are also ours. You are not so good an actress as Lady Godwin, who by the bye I find played at the King's Theatre before you were born. Unless you mask your feelings better than you did last night, missy, there will very soon be a coolness between you and our hosts which will compel us to take our departure before any chance can be found of approaching Sir Gilbert. That is why I wish to make you think the best of the people here, rather than the worst. What you heard

from your maid, I heard from my man ; so that accounts a little for my hearing the news from you with complacency."

"I beg your pardon. I was hasty and unjust. But it seemed to me——" Lydia stopped.

"That old Tickel was either too careless or too careful. Well, my dear, I think I shall show you that I cannot be too careful—and I feel it my duty to show you this that you also may be on your guard. And I may as well tell you, my dear, that had you not written to me last night I should certainly have written to you, though not to appoint a meeting at this hour you may be sure." Mr. Tickel paused to pick another flower, then continued : "I suppose Blase never by any accident told you a word respecting the history of his servant Hutchins ?"

"No."

"It was scarcely likely, unless as a sort

of explanation. He never told me; but then there were many things he never told me. However, Hutchins last night when he brought me your letter, made the startling announcement that he is Lady Godwin's brother-in-law."

"Hutchins?"

"Hutchins. And it seems he knows enough about the murder of the first Lady Godwin and Father Dominick's behaviour at that time to have a powerful influence on Sir Gilbert if ever we get at him, or upon a jury if we have to go to the law for Father Dominick's punishment. That, however, does not concern us immediately. What we have to fear is, that Father Dominick will see him. He would suspect complicity at once, and take measures that might be disastrous to our hopes. Of course Hutchins had no notion that we were coming here, and he seems to have been in a pretty taking when he found

that he was to follow us with the baggage. Hitherto he has managed to keep out of Father Dominick's sight, but the discovery is likely to be made at any moment. The mention of his name, though not an uncommon one, may arouse the curiosity of Lady Godwin and Father Dominick, and albeit they have not met the man for years, they are likely to remember his face well enough to identify him."

"What is to be done?"

"I dare say I shall find a plausible excuse to get Hutchins out of the house in the course of the day. His daughter is at Redwater. It is natural he should wish to see her."

"And after he is gone?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Tickel with a shrug of his shoulder. "With respect to other difficulties to be overcome, I am afraid I can offer no useful suggestion. It struck me when I first heard Hutchin's story that

we might take him to Redwater and demand Captain Davenant's interference on behalf of his grandson. But how could he force an entrance if the gates were closed against him, and the servants told him that they were shut by Sir Gilbert's orders? Your idea is the best, my dear; and it would be unwise to abandon it until every ruse and stratagem to get the better of our foes has been tried and has failed. One advantage we have, and that is that the servants, as I learn from Hutchins, have no love for Father Dominick. With the aid of Providence *and* the servants we may in time do something. But you see how necessary it is to play your part well. And now, my dear, take these flowers in your hand and put on a pretty air of rustic innocence and joy, for hither comes Mr. Eugenius, who seems to be quite as wide awake as we are."

Lydia smiled sweetly as she took the

flowers which Mr. Tickel with such prudent foresight had plucked for her ; and then raising her head assumed an air of surprise and pleasure in seeing Eugenius.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF LYDIA'S EXTRAORDINARY BEHAVIOUR IN
THE CHAPEL.

"I AM delighted to see you looking so much better this morning, my dear Miss Liston," said Lady Godwin when they met at breakfast.

"I was very tired last night," replied Lydia. "Rest and fresh air have given me a new life."

"Hum!" said Mr. Tickel. "There's more due to fresh air than to rest, my dear. Will you believe it, my lady, this young person sent me an imperative order at half-past six o'clock this morning to get up and join her in the garden? Half-past

six, I give you my word ; and I usually lie until nine. May I trouble you, my lady, for a little more cream ?—'tis excellent."

"Mrs. Romsey is not seriously indisposed, I hope?" Father Dominick said, turning to Lydia, who sat this morning by his side.

"My aunt is very frequently troubled with a headache, when it is time to rise ; but that does not prevent her making a very good breakfast in bed. I do not think her indisposition is more serious than Mr. Tickel's would have been under the same conditions. I foresaw that, and, you see, if I had not obliged him to get up and keep *me* in countenance for rising so early, I must have stopped in my chamber to keep *him* in countenance for lying so late. My charity was not broad enough to sacrifice my own pleasure for his. The morning is the most charming part of the day in the country. And oh, sir, what lovely country this is! Mr.

Eugenius took us through a wood thick with wind-flowers and bluebells, and thence to a hill side where a most handsome landscape spread before the eye."

"A still finer view is obtained from the top of the watch-tower," observed Lady Godwin.

"For my part," said Mr. Tickel, "I expect to find nothing more worthy of admiration from the outside of your watch-tower, my lady, than I find inside your breakfast parlour."

"And can one really ascend to the top of that tower?" Lydia asked in a tone of simplicity, which harmonized with the air of innocent gaiety she had assumed at the parson's bidding, and maintained with very fair ability ever since.

"There is a staircase built in the wall, with an entrance from the chapel," replied Eugenius.

"Oh, how romantic! I should like to

ascend if I dared. And the chapel—you can't tell how desirous I am of examining it. The whole house is so quaint and picturesque that I shall not be satisfied until I have explored it thoroughly. I hope you will not take it ill, Lady Godwin, if I attempt to gratify my curiosity."

"On the contrary, my dear Miss Liston, I shall have the greatest pleasure in showing you all that is to be seen in the old house. The north wing, which is occupied by Sir Gilbert, I cannot show you, for in regard to his wishes the only entrance is kept constantly locked, and even the servants, with the exception of a nurse, are not admitted. But all the rest of the house is open to investigation."

"If it is agreeable to our friends," said Father Dominick, "we might make the exploration after breakfast this morning."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" exclaimed Lydia with childish glee.

“What do you say, Mr. Tickel?”

“The project is most agreeable to me, sir. But the prospect of one pleasure will not induce me to cut short the enjoyment of another, my dear,” Mr. Tickel said, addressing Lydia. “So I beg you to control your impatience while I drink another cup of chocolate and eat a second rasher of this very excellent ham.”

When Mr. Tickel's appetite was at length satisfied, and Lady Godwin had assured herself that Mrs. Romsey had no inclination to rise from her bed and join the party, they left the breakfast parlour and crossed the courtyard to the gateway below the watch-tower, from which a door opened into the chapel, Mr. Tickel giving his arm to Lady Godwin and leading the way, Lydia escorted by Father Dominick, and Eugenius following.

Lady Godwin, who carried a bunch of keys, unlocked the door in the gateway,

and then led the way up a short flight of stairs to a second door, which she threw open, and the party entered the chapel.

“A most interesting monument,” exclaimed Mr. Tickel, standing in the centre of the chapel, and looking about him with the air of a man who was expected to know something about what he saw. “A fine specimen of waggon-roofed ceiling. The gridiron and the forked flames that I see so frequently repeated is, I suppose, a cognisance of the Godwin house?”

“No, sir; that is a portcullis, the badge of Henry VII.; the thunderbolts are the Godwin cognisance.”

“Ah, just so. Your altar is very rich, and the pulpit, I take it, is a very ancient piece of carving, if I may judge by the fashion.” Mr. Tickel knew nothing whatever about wood-carving, but he saw that the wood was very black and worm-eaten. “And that is a truly artistic specimen of

coloured glass, so is t'other. May I ask, sir, what saint that figure is supposed to represent?" he asked in a tone of great interest.

"Which figure, Mr. Tickel?"

"The man in red, sir, who is spitting a goose."

"That is St. George and the dragon."

"Precisely so. Prodigious curious, upon my word!"

While Mr. Tickel was making these observations Lydia had approached the organ, which stood against that end of the building abutting on the north side of the house.

"You will play something, Mr. Eugenius?" she said. "I am dying to hear that piece of Bach's which you mentioned when we were in town."

"I shall have the greatest pleasure in playing to you this afternoon. At present there is no one about to work the bellows."

Lydia desired to see the bellows, and while this part of the instrument was being shown her she contrived to cast furtive glances over the wall, where, however, she saw nothing to encourage her hope of gaining access to the north wing through the chapel. Leaving the organ, she walked slowly round the building, accompanied by Eugenius and Lady Godwin, pausing at every object to make some girlish exclamation of astonishment or admiration.

“Oh, what a quaint old door!” she cried suddenly as they approached the end by which they had entered. “Do look, what a beautiful design is formed by the scroll work of the hinges!”

“Ah, that is the door that opens to the tower staircase,” said Eugenius.

“Oh, how remarkable! Mr. Tickel do come and look at this!” cried the girl eagerly. Lady Godwin standing a little

back glanced sidelong at Lydia with a momentary expression of contempt. Was this little fool to be feared? she might have been asking herself.

“Do look at those lovely scrolls, Mr. Tickel, and these great bolts! I don’t think I could move them, could I?”

“They are not so difficult to move as you think,” said Father Dominick. “Will you try?”

Lydia put her two hands upon the bolt and drew it back; then she drew the second.

“Now pull the ring,” said Lady Godwin in the encouraging tone with which children are sometimes addressed.

Lydia pulled the ring and the door swung slowly back, disclosing a perfectly dark space. She started back with unfeigned terror, for at that moment the thought crossed her mind that this might be a trap for her, and that Father Dominick

intended to imprison her as he had imprisoned Sir Gilbert. It was a foolish fear doubtless, but not unnatural to a young girl in her strange position. Lady Godwin laughed heartily at her fears, and even the saturnine priest smiled grimly.

"It looks like a dungeon," said Lydia.

"I am afraid then," said Eugenius, "you will hardly care to enter it even to get a view from the top."

"Is there no other entrance?" she asked.

"None. There is a small hole half-way up to admit light, but there is no other outlet until you reach the top of the tower. Would you like to look upwards, you can see the loophole, and you will find that the stairs are sufficiently clear after the first half dozen are passed."

"You—you won't shut the door," Lydia said drawing near the entrance timidly. Mr. Tickel and Lady Godwin laughed; Eugenius assured her that no cruel practical

joke should be played. She put her head through the doorway and looked upward. Withdrawing she said :

“It is not so dark as I expected ; will you look Mr. Tickel ?”

“No thank you, my dear. I once was induced to go inside the monument on Fish Street Hill, with a faint idea of going to the top, but a glance up those stairs was sufficient for me.”

“Shall we go up ?” asked Eugenius.

“Not for me !” said Mr. Tickel emphatically. “It makes me giddy to look out of a first-floor window.”

“I should like to go,” said Lydia. “But are you sure the stairs won’t give way, and precipitate us all into some dreadful pit ?”

“The gentlemen shall take the first chance of a disaster,” said Lady Godwin, laughing again.

Father Dominick and Eugenius at once

entered the staircase, and their feet were heard ascending. Lydia held back.

“Why, my dear child, you are absolutely white with fear.” And indeed the girl was as pale as ash, but not with the feeling Lady Godwin attributed to her. “Come, pluck up courage!”

The feet on the stairs had stopped. The voices of Eugenius and Father Dominick came to Lydia’s ear in a muffled undertone.

“You are coming with me,” said Lydia faintly.

“Of course, my child.”

“Then if you will give me your hand as soon as you get inside.”

“Why you are a timid little goose,” cried Lady Godwin, and with these words she boldly stepped into the dark entry.

Quick as a flash of light, and with a shrill little scream, Lydia caught hold of the door by which she stood and slammed it to, and then with hands strengthened by

desperate energy she shot the bolts one after the other. And this done the girl half delirious with excitement threw her slight weight against the door and called frantically to Mr. Tickel to come and add his weight.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING THE PRISONERS IN GODWIN'S
MOAT, AND HOW THEY WERE HELD.

MR. TICKEL was not less astonished by the audacious act of the girl than were the three people imprisoned in the tower. He stood for a moment aghast and, to use his own expression, dumbfounded; but he answered at once to Lydia's call for help.

“My dear,” he said, “there's not the slightest fear that these bolts will yield, but——”

Lydia herself was now conscious of that, and she slid to the ground as helpless and weak as an infant. Mr. Tickel bent down and lifted her flaccid body in his arms.

Her head drooped upon his shoulder, her lips were colourless, her eyelids fell. Her nerves were overstrained by the violent tension put upon them; her force was gone. Mr. Tickel had a terrible suspicion that she was about to faint away, and he had not the slightest notion of what was to be done to restore her.

“For the Lord’s sake don’t swoon, my dear,” he cried. “The servants will come, and then all the fat ’ll be in the fire; think of the danger!” Unconsciously he had hit upon the very best restorative to revive Lydia’s fainting courage.

“Danger!” she said, opening her eyes quickly and raising herself in his arms. “Tell me what I am to do.”

“There’s a brave girl,” said the parson, greatly relieved to see the return of animation in the girl’s face. “Do you think you can walk without my assistance?”

“Yes, yes; I am quite strong now.

My heart seemed to stop. I am myself again. only my thoughts are confused. Tell me to do something."

"Go as quietly as you can to the kitchen, find Hutchins, and bring him to me. I will stop here and guard the door. Have no fear, and don't let your face alarm the servants."

Lydia pushed back her hair from her temples, gave her head a little shake as if to disperse the signs of agitation from her face, and left the chapel with a tolerably firm step.

Meanwhile the prisoners had recovered from their dismay, and were not dormant. Lady Godwin was alternately thumping the door and demanding to be released *immediately*; while from the top of the tower Father Dominick and Eugenius were shouting vigorously for some one named Beagles.

"Have you lost your senses? Are you

mad? I order you to undo the door at once, or bitterly you shall repent this outrage," screamed Lady Godwin. Mr. Tickel made no response, but carefully examined the bolts upon the door.

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud! at the door.

"Do you hear me?" screamed the lady.

Mr. Tickel nodded in silence.

"Beagles! Beagles! Beagles!" from the top of the tower.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

"Let me out at once, infamous wretches!"

Then there reached Mr. Tickel's ear the sound of imperative orders called from the tower top, a muttered response from the court-yard, and the sound of heavy footsteps ascending the chapel stairs. The parson set his back against the door, his lips closing firmly and his nostrils whitening with distension.

The gardener entered the chapel—a

grizzly-bearded tall old man of sixty. Instinctively he touched his hat to Mr. Tickel.

“Measter zes I be to open thic thäre döör, zir,” he said.

“Who is your master, my good man?” asked the parson.

“Why, zir, in a manner o’ speakun, Zir Gilbert be my mäster.”

“Did he tell you to open the door?”

“Tell ’ee the truth, zir, he didn’t.”

“When he does tell you to open it, you may open it, but by God no one shall lay a hand on it before.”

“Open the door at once, Beagles,” cried the muffled voice of Lady Godwin.

“B’ ’anged ef I know what I be to do,” said Beagles, scratching his head.

“I’ll tell you what you shall do,” the parson said in a voice of authority. “If you are the honest God-fearing Englishman I take you to be, you shall help me

to save Sir Gilbert Godwin; for I cannot think you will be concerned with these wicked papists in his murder."

"Goody heart! I doant hold wi' no popes for zertain zure, mäster."

At this juncture Lydia returned, followed by Hutchins.

"Hutchins, I am about to leave you to guard this entrance," said Mr. Tickel. "In my absence you will neither open the door at the request of those within, nor permit any one else to open it."

"No one shall lay a finger on the door while I'm here," said Hutchins stoutly.

Mr. Tickel gave a last look at the bolts, and then giving his arm to Lydia, he said :

"Now, my dear, we will go and speak to the servants, and so make sure of our garrison. Come with me if you please, Beagles." He spoke with an air of such severe authority that the gardener, despite some unquiet doubts that yet lingered in

his heavy mind, had no option but to comply, and signified his obedience by touching his hat.

Mr. Tickel, with Lydia upon his arm, left the chapel and crossed the court-yard with a majestic port towards the steps of the dining-hall where the awe-stricken servants were clustered in a group peeping up at Father Dominick and Eugenius who stood upon the top of the watch-tower.

“Mr. Tickel, will you listen to me?” shouted Father Dominick.

“Yes, sir!” replied the parson, stopping and looking upward; “I will listen to you when I have heard what Sir Gilbert Godwin has to say.” Then he resumed his march.

“Beagles, if you do not instantly open the tower door you shall be discharged, and your family shall be turned off the estate,” called Father Dominick.

Beagles, without making any reply, plodded steadily on behind Mr. Tickel.

“Have the goodness,” said Mr. Tickel addressing the servants, “to come with me into the hall.” He led Lydia to the head of the long table, where, keeping her by his side, he turned about to face the servants who had followed him and stood in a knot at a respectful distance. He looked at them as in old times he had looked at his congregation, to gather from their faces some idea of the kind of sermon that would suit them. The cook and the housemaid were buxom, and their stupid faces expressed but stupid alarm; the coachman, a clean-shaven, curly-haired, fair-skinned young fellow, with round blue eyes, and a very large mouth, which he kept well opened, wore a look of amused expectancy as if he anticipated that Mr. Tickel was going to say something funny. Beagles alone showed signs of an intelli-

gent perception of the grave responsibility of his position. His brows were knitted, the corners of his lips were drawn down, the whole cast of his countenance revealed the deep reflective mind of a man habituated to considering the advisability of precarious courses, of deciding between the prudence of planting out seedlings at once, or of holding on for another fortnight, and settling such like knotty questions.

“In the first place,” said Mr. Tickel, “are any of you papists?”

Beagles had already asserted that he did not hold with the pope; the rest of the servants expressed the same sentiment by shaking their heads in reply to the parson's question.

“In that case I may conclude that you are all favourably disposed towards your master, Sir Gilbert Godwin, and have no complicity with the wicked people whom

we have succeeded in securing in the watch-tower. You know that Sir Gilbert is confined in the north wing of this house; you know that no one is ever permitted to approach him except a deaf woman, and that even she is not allowed to see your unfortunate master. Why she should be admitted to that part of the house in preference to you is obvious: you might be moved by his prayers to communicate with his friends. We are his friends. This young lady will one day be the bride of Sir Gilbert's legitimate son who, through the wicked devices of that unholy priest, has been banished from his father's house. No doubt your intelligent minds have conceived that Father Dominick has imprisoned Sir Gilbert with an evil motive. Your suspicions are just. Father Dominick's intention is to make himself the master of Sir Gilbert's estate. What tortures have been employed to force that

poor unhappy gentleman to consent to such a disposition of his property we cannot say. Perhaps when all the household have been wrapt in slumber some cry for help may have been raised."

"We've heered 'un, zir," said the coachman.

"Then my supposition is not unfounded. My good people, there has been a murder in this house; it is possible there may be another when Sir Gilbert has signed his will, unless you help us to prevent it by giving the baronet his liberty. If after this warning you should do anything to assist the escape of the three persons now in the watch-tower, and so to defeat our endeavours in behalf of Sir Gilbert, you would undoubtedly be punished by the law as accomplices of those interested in the ruin and death of Sir Gilbert. The punishment of murder is death by hanging in this world, and everlasting brim-

stone fire in the next. I am a clergyman in the Church of England, and I know."

These words struck a deep impression upon the minds of the servants. The two women shrank in terror behind the coachman, whose breathing grew audible, as if he already felt the pressure of a cord about his throat. Even Beagles showed symptoms of agitation.

"I doan't zide wi' no popery," he said, "an' if zo be as you be clargyman we be bound to do yewer biddun. What wi' early blights, and late frostes, I veel mortal zartain there's zomeut wrong zome-where."

"Well said, Beagles. And you, my good women, may we depend upon you?"

"Oh la! yes, sir; zo be you won't let 'em loose."

"They will remain in the tower until Sir Gilbert himself orders them to be set free. In the meantime you will take your

orders from Miss Liston here. And now, Beagles, to prevent any assistance being given to the prisoners from the outside, we will close the gates. Do you know where the keys are kept?"

"I do, zir," said the coachman gleefully.

"Then let us go and shut the gates at once. My dear," he said turning to Lydia, "you will make inquiries of the servants relative to the nurse. If she comes down we may get the key from her; if not we must force the door."

Mr. Tickel left the hall with the two men and crossed the court-yard to the great gateway, under the eyes of Father Dominick and Eugenius, who still stood upon the tower. The young coachman treated them to a broad grin as he looked up, and observed that they looked for all the world like a pair of "jack-däs." When the iron gates beyond the bridge were shut and the lock fastened, Mr. Tickel

put the key in his pocket for safety, and then returning by the court-yard he took the same precaution to prevent either ingress or egress by the gate in the north wing which opened upon the garden.

These movements were watched in sombre silence by Father Dominick and Eugenius, but Lady Godwin, who had joined them, could not contain her rage, and showered down a volley of invectives which Mr. Tickel bore with unruffled dignity as he solemnly marched from the northern gate to the dining-hall. The young coachman, however, had no sense of dignity, and falling back behind his new master he retorted in pantomime, imitating very fairly the vehement gestures of the enraged lady on the tower.

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Tickel, meeting Lydia on the threshold of the hall, “have you seen anything of the nurse?”

“No. I find that Lady Godwin visited

Sir Gilbert this morning before eight, while we were in the wood, and that the nurse fetched as usual a dish of chocolate. I am told that it is customary for Father Dominick and Lady Godwin to cross to the north wing at half-past eleven o'clock, and stay there until one; at twelve the nurse fetches the lunch prepared for him in the kitchen."

Mr. Tickel looked at his watch; it was half-past ten.

"At what hours are the meals served here usually, do you know, my dear?"

"Breakfast at eight—it was late this morning—lunch at eleven; dinner at two; a dish of chocolate or tea at five, and supper at eight.

"Have you given any orders to the cook?"

"None. I am waiting for your advice."

"Very well, my dear; then I advise that the ordinary rules shall be followed as

closely as possible. Let us keep the women quiet. If they are frightened they will be wanting to go away before nightfall, which would not be pleasant for us. For that reason it will be better to get the key from the nurse than to break open the doors."

Lydia made no response : she was feverishly impatient of inaction.

"You see, my dear, pursued Mr. Tickel, "we do not at all know in what condition we shall find the baronet. For anything we know to the contrary he may be too ill to take any action in this matter ; his mind may be deranged ; it may be a more tedious business than we imagine ; and if the servants become terrified unlooked for complications may arise that will overthrow our best laid schemes."

"I dare say you are right," said Lydia.

"I believe I am, my dear. After all, it

is but a matter of an hour's delay. And now order lunch to be served in half an hour ; and then go up and look after Mrs. Romsey. Let her know everything before she comes down, so that she may eat her meal in peace. Meanwhile, I will go out and devise some plan of conveying food to the prisoners, for, bad as they are, we must not starve them."

A consultation followed between Mr. Tickel, Hutchins, Beagles, and the young coachman as to the best means of conveying food to the prisoners in the tower. The young coachman was fertile in suggestions. He first undertook to fling the victuals up, and then volunteered to "stand by wi' a fark" in case any of the inmates of the tower should have the temerity to come out when the door was opened. But Mr. Tickel was averse to opening the door on any consideration. Ultimately it was agreed that Beagles should get a certain

long ladder, which, after much careful consideration, he reckoned would reach between a foot, a foot and a half, or two feet of the little square window in the side of the tower, and that a basket containing the food should be handed through the window to those within.

This arrangement was carried out. Beagle's discriminating eye was not deceived; the ladder, placed at a suitable angle, came exactly to the spot his imagination had marked, which was not surprising as he adjusted it; and Hutchins carried up the basket containing a lunch for three, selected with great care and generous feeling by Mr. Tickel from the good things in the larder. The young coachman was anxious to perform this service; but as he, seeming to think the whole thing a huge practical joke, had suggested substituting a bottle of horse physic for the claret Mr. Tickel had chosen,

the parson deemed it wiser to let him stand below and hold the ladder.

Having deposited the basket in the embrasure of the window, Hutchins descended, and the ladder was removed. Mr. Tickel returned to the dining-hall, where lunch awaited him; and Hutchins posted himself on guard before the door in the chapel. Here he was visited at intervals by the young coachman, whose ingenuity in devising means for the annoyance of the captives was not checked by repeated rejection of them. Covertly he brought a large horse-pistol, which he proposed to fire under the door; then a cage of ferrets—animals that Lady Godwin had expressed the utmost dread of—which he desired to set at large in the tower, “just to skeer ’em up a bit,” as he said. But these offers Hutchins declined with persistent firmness, though doubtless as he remembered the wrongs put upon

him by Father Dominick and Lady Godwin, he was restrained from accepting by no feeling of pity or mercy.

Mrs. Romsey had a great deal to say during lunch upon the revelation which Lydia had made to her. As a matter of course, she had suspected Eugenius from the very beginning, and felt certain that something was concealed from her knowledge which she ought to have been told. She was very certain that the worst was yet to come; and if they were all murdered in their beds she, for her part, should not feel at all surprised. Her unerring instinct had warned her before ever she left London that it would be much better to stay at home, and this was a warning to be guided in future by her own judgment, which she should not forget until her dying day. With much matter to the same purpose she occupied her thoughts if not the thoughts of those to whom she ad-

dressed her remarks, until the waiting-maid entered the hall in haste with the information that the nurse was below in the kitchen.

Making a sign to Lydia to remain where she was, Mr. Tickel rose at once and left the hall with the servant; in five minutes he returned carrying a key in his hand.

“You will stay here, my dear, with your aunt,” he said to Lydia. “I have the key, and I am now going to find Sir Gilbert. Be sure I shall return as soon as I have any news to bring you.”

CHAPTER XV.

OF FURTHER DISCOVERIES MADE BY THE
PARSON.

BEAGLES was waiting with the nurse outside the door. The gardener carried a bunch of keys that he had collected from the many doors in the unclosed portion of the house.

Father Dominick, standing on the tower, his tall narrow figure slightly bent, his arms crossed, his chin upon his breast, watched them cross the angle of the courtyard between the hall and the gateway in the north wing, with an aspect of cold impassability.

Entering by the side door in the gateway, Mr. Tickel and the gardener followed the nurse up the flight of stairs to a

corridor which, corresponding to that in the south wing, skirted the line of chambers which looked upon the courtyard. Two doors were open, one was the entrance to a small chamber occupied by the nurse, the other, not far removed, led into a more spacious apartment.

“This is Sir Gilbert’s sitting-room,” said the nurse as Mr. Tickel entered. “His bedroom is through there,” she pointed to a door on one side of the room. Mr. Tickel crossed quickly and tried the latch. The lock was fastened. He signed to Beagles, and while the gardener was slowly trying the most likely keys in his collection, the parson had time to glance round the room. A fire burnt in the chimney; by the side a large elbow-chair was drawn up, and near that stood a table; a few newspapers and one or two books lay on a sideboard. Dull thick curtains before the window cast a gloom over the bare room.

“That’s got un, I deu think,” said Beagles, and the next moment the door was open.

“Make the woman understand that she is to prepare Sir Gilbert’s lunch in the ordinary way, Beagles, and see that she does it,” said Mr. Tickel; then he passed through the door and closed it securely behind him.

“Why have you kept me here so long?” said a tremulous voice in a tone of complaint. “I heard the clock go eleven long——” The speaker stopped short, for Mr. Tickel had drawn back the heavy green curtains, and was looking down at him.

Mr. Tickel had seen a couple of portraits of Sir Gilbert that hung in the dining-hall. One represented him a bright-eyed vivacious young fellow of eighteen; the other a hale and hearty man of forty, with a double chin, full sensuous lips, and a lickerous eye. This latter picture had

pleased the parson. There were evident signs that the portrait had been painted to flatter ; the nose especially bore witness to very laborious efforts on the part of the artist to keep it pale without destroying its harmony with the high tone of the general complexion. Looking at it with half-closed eyes, Mr. Tickel had seen Sir Gilbert as the artist might have painted him, and found a verification of the description Blase had given of his father, as a free-living, headstrong, weak-minded, lusty country gentleman. With this picture in his mind he wondered for a moment if this could be the original whom he now regarded.

The baronet leaned upon his right elbow, and looked up at his visitor with an expression of feeble astonishment and apprehension. His beard had been allowed to grow ; it was white, and covered the lower part of his face ; from below the

border of his night-cap a silvery curl fell over his temple. His skin was of a leaden hue, streaked upon the cheek-bones and nose with tiny red filaments. The flesh had fallen away from his cheeks, and the skin was puckered in the angles of his sunken eyes, and formed loose sacs below the under lids. Many men of seventy would have looked younger than he.

Mr. Tickel was not a sentimental man, or one who naturally took the misfortunes of his fellow creatures deeply to heart; but it touched his soul with compassion to look at this poor old wreck and think of the pictures in the hall.

“Who—who are you?” asked Sir Gilbert in quavering tones.

“I doubt if you would know me by name, sir; but believe me, I am your very sincere friend.”

“Ah, that’s what the other attorney said; but I wouldn’t have anything to do

with him ; and I'm very sorry you've had your pains to come here for nothing, sir ; but I won't put my name to any paper."

"What, sir, d'ye take me for a lawyer?" cried Mr. Tickel, laughing; "a lawyer with a waist that the tailor has to measure half at a time! No, sir, 'tis t'other way about: I'm a parson."

"A parson!" said Sir Gilbert incredulously. "Why have they sent you to me?"

"We'll talk about that presently. The first thing to be done is to get you up and dressed. Now then, sir, how do we manage?—which foot first?"

Half-dazed with the strangeness of the situation, and seemingly suspicious of a treacherous intention in the parson's presence, Sir Gilbert accepted Mr. Tickel's assistance in silence, only speaking when response to a question was demanded. He was powerless to move without help; he

could with difficulty raise the foot and hand upon his left side ; he needed support even to stand upright. Mr. Tickel showed great tenderness in helping him to dress, and maintained a cheerful flow of small talk all the time, avoiding for the present any reference to grave matters.

“What, sir, don’t you wear a wig?” he said. “Well you’re perhaps in the right, for your own hair is prodigious fine and silky, and has a curl in it like any young lad’s. But you must have that beard off before long; you find it mighty inconvenient for drinking I should say, to have a mass of hair on your lip like that. By the way, sir, what have you had in the basin I see by your bedside?”

“They brought me a dish of tea.”

“A poor stuff for drinking of a morning. A mug of good October ale, sir, would be better for you in my thinking.”

Sir Gilbert looked sideways at Mr.

Tickel with a curious expression of astonishment and mistrust.

“I warrant you’ll relish a good solid lunch after such a washy breakfast, and the sooner you get it the better. Now, sir, are we about ready?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Then let me get my arm round you, so—is that easy sir? Right. Then now we’ll toddle along.”

The gardener was waiting in the adjoining room; his surprise to see Sir Gilbert was not more than that of Sir Gilbert to see him.

“Turn that chair round, Beagles. You don’t object to your servant being in the room?” asked Mr. Tickel.

“No, no; I am glad, quite glad,” replied the baronet, still seeming much perplexed.

“You hear that, Beagles. Come, haven’t you a civil word to say to your master after his illness?”

Thus called to a sense of duty Beagles touched his forelock, shuffled his feet, and—a smile like a wintry gleam of sunshine touching his earthy face, replied :

“Right glad to zee you about again Zir Gilbert ; no’ but what you do zeem roon to zeed a good deal zince the fäll.”

“There, sit you down there, sir ; and now—halloa, what’s this ?” The parson had turned to the table, and as he spoke he took up a porringer and holding it to the light looked at its contents with blank amazement. “What on earth is this ?”

“Lunch,” replied Sir Gilbert.

Mr. Tickel sank silently into a chair, put the porringer to his nose, and then looked at Beagles, and from him to Sir Gilbert, and back again to Beagles for an explanation.

“Nuss, she fetched it,” Beagles said in a tone of apology.

“Porridge !” said Mr. Tickel, after

putting the mixture again to his nose.
“Porridge for a man’s lunch after a breakfast of tea?”

“I always have porridge for lunch and for supper.”

“And what do you have for dinner?”

“Mutton broth.”

“And what do you drink?”

“Toast water, tea, and sometimes a dish of chocolate.”

“Do you never have a roast sirloin of beef, nor a saddle of mutton, nor a capon, nor a bottle of red wine, nor a pipe of tobacco?”

Sir Gilbert shook his head to each suggestion.

“Nothing but slops?”

“Nothing.”

“And how long have you been kept alive on this diet?”

“Since my illness. ’Tis by the doctor’s orders, I am told, that I have this food.”

“When did the doctor see you last?”

“I don’t know, two or three months since.”

“And are you one tittle the stronger since he left you?”

Sir Gilbert shook his head.

Mr. Tickel glanced at the feeble invalid for a minute in silent pity, and dropped his eyes once more upon the porringer. Then his lips closed, the spread nostrils of his great nose grew white, and rising from his chair without a word he went to the window, thrust back the curtains with an angry jerk of his hand, opened the window, and flung the porringer down into the court-yard with all the force that indignation could lend to his arm.

“Go down to the hall, Beagles,” he said, turning round, “and bid Miss Liston send up a tray of lunch such as *I* can eat, and enough for two men; and go yourself and fetch up such a bottle of claret as was

served at dinner yesterday. And look you, let that red-cheeked wench carry the tray, for your master's done with the nurse; and bid the cook step up and pay her respects to Sir Gilbert."

"To be zure, zir, right gladly." And with that Beagles, now radiant with delight, shuffled quickly towards the door.

"And hark ye," cried Mr. Tickel, "tell Miss Liston that when she's set out the lunch I shall be glad to see her here."

"I will zir."

"And—Beagles! If you can make the nurse hear, bid her make mutton broth for three to-day; for by the lord Father Dominick and his family shall have nothing but mutton broth and porridge while I command their commissariat."

"I'll make her hear *thät*, 'pend on it, zir!"

Mr. Tickel took a seat opposite to Sir Gilbert, breathing quickly, and with but

little of that calm in his mind which he prided himself upon maintaining.

“I don’t understand,” Sir Gilbert said in his timorous, tremulous tone.

“I have taken the liberty, Sir Gilbert, of sending for such food as a man in your condition should have, and I shall give myself the pleasure of eating with you, if you have no objection; and if you will permit me I’ll first have those curtains back and let a little of Heaven’s brightness into this gloomy hole of a room.”

“It is gloomy, but it inspires a man with religious thoughts. If you are a parson, sir, as I judge by your coat, I should like to talk to you about religion,” the baronet said with more eagerness in his feeble voice.

Mr. Tickel had pulled back the curtains as far as they would go, and he now returned to his seat.

“With all my heart, sir,” he said—“after lunch. For I take it, sir, ’tis better in a

man to turn his thoughts to the Highest when body and heart are fresh and strong than when sickness saps his courage and he is prone to mistake that for devotion which is only fear."

Sir Gilbert's mind was certainly not strong enough to contest this point; it had already wandered from the subject of religion.

"Where are *they*?" he asked, looking about him.

"Father Dominick and his family?"

"His family?" faltered the baronet. "I don't know what you mean. My wife, Lady Godwin, and my second son Eugenius."

"Bah, sir, you have no second son. Eugenius has not the impudence to claim your name out of this house; and as for the woman who calls herself Lady Godwin, I have a witness to prove that she was the priest's mistress up to the very day you

married her, as I wager she has been ever since."

"A witness to prove that?"

"Aye, and more than that. He will prove, or I am much mistaken, that Father Dominick murdered your first wife, to make place for his mistress."

"Oh no! I—I thought so at one time, but they have disproved it. What a wretch should I have been else. Could I ever hope for Divine pardon?"

"Well, well, we will talk of that by and by. At present these worthies are shut up in your watch tower, and there they shall stay until you are strong enough to judge them fairly and treat them according to their deserts."

"It is our duty, our Christian duty, to forgive. You, as a parson, should know that."

"I do, and no one better. We'll forgive them with all our hearts—when they're

punished, and can do you no more injury."

"'Tis all a whirl!" the feeble old man said, passing his hand over his eyes. "I cannot see it, how—how——"

"How did they come to be shut up? you would ask. I'll tell you, sir, in a few words if we must broach the subject before lunch. The affair turns upon the misfortunes of your son Blase."

"Blase—my boy Blase! He would not come to see me in my illness. When I lay dying, as I thought, he would not be reconciled."

"My God, sir! your boy Blase at this very moment believes you to be as strong and hearty as when you sent him about his business half a year ago."

"They told me he refused to see me."

"They are liars, sir," cried Mr. Tickel, bringing down his fist with force upon the table; "they told him nothing of your state,

and for a very good reason. Had he known you had been so sick he wouldn't have been fool enough to sign a conveyance of his heritage."

"What conveyance?"

"Did you not order your agents in London to pay him a sum of money on his signing a conveyance of his hereditary rights to your estate?"

"No. I am quite certain I did no such thing. I was asked to sign a will leaving the disposition of my property to my wife, but I refused; for I know I have done my son great wrong, and I—I have," he hesitated, "I have mistrusted my wife since I was struck down."

"And with good reason. There's forgery to add to her other crimes. A paper bearing your signature was brought to Blase to sign; it was a covenant binding him to sign a deed of conveyance when it was prepared. That deed was carried to him

only last week, and signed by him at Dublin, where he is quartered with his regiment."

"His regiment! Is Blase a soldier?"

"Aye, sir, and the handsomest, stoutest fellow in the army; and I warrant he'll give the teagues a dusting if they rise, as 'tis expected they will."

The old man rubbed his hands together and his eyes twinkled faintly.

"Do you see, sir, it was after this covenant had been signed that we—the friends of Blase—heard of your illness; that aroused our suspicions, and concealing our intentions, we came hither as the friends of that young devil Eugenius, with the hope of seeing you. But arrived here we found you had shut yourself up in this wing that nobody might come near you, and forbidden your doors to be unlocked to any one."

"I never gave such orders."

“Of course you didn’t. They couldn’t have kept you in this feeble state, and gradually starved you to death under the plausible pretext of obeying the doctor’s orders, had anyone visited you. They couldn’t have concocted their forgery, and the plans they laid for getting the whole of your property into their hands, if you could have made your thoughts known. Oh, it was a subtle and well-laid plan for your ruin and the ruin of your son. Who was to save you if by your orders the doors were closed against all who sought to see you? Who could have proved the crimes of forgery and murder against them had you succumbed to their insidious treatment? They merely obeyed the doctor’s orders and your wishes. The woman who attends to your rooms was chosen because she was stone deaf and could hear nothing. Do you see the villainy now?”

“It seems suspicious,” said the baronet

timidly, "but we must not judge hastily—it is wrong."

"Thank the Lord, sir, we're not all of your opinion. Well, well. It was seen, sir, that the only way of getting at you was to lock up those who would have prevented us. So they were fastened up in the tower like rats in a trap, sir!"

"And who—who had the courage to do that?"

"A maid, sir: the bravest, sweetest, best maid under the sun. And here she is, sir," he said, pointing to the door where Lydia stood, "your son's sweetheart!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTAINING SOME UNLOOKED-FOR EVENTS.

LYDIA sat beside Sir Gilbert with his hand in hers, looking up in his face now and then with that wistful tenderness which is natural to most good women in the presence of a suffering man.

“I cannot say much in my own defence,” the old man murmured, touched by the beauty and gentleness of the girl beside him; “I have so much to think on and so much to regret. But you must not consider too harshly of me. I have done great wrong in my life, but I repent, and I have become very religious. You see there are no gloves nor singlesticks about—no wicked

pictures of race horses and boxers. And I read the Bible a great deal, and I never skip the long chapters full of names, and I mean to have a long talk with the parson."

"After lunch, sir," said Mr. Tickel. "And now let us fall to, for the girl has laid that which will do you good."

The parson moved Sir Gilbert's chair to the table and seated himself opposite, for he had not such a poor stomach but that he could eat a second lunch to keep the baronet company.

Sir Gilbert seemed to enjoy the solid food, although at first he hesitated, as if dubious whether it was consistent with repentance and his religious purposes to indulge in such a repast. His appetite was soon satisfied, and he drank no more than a glass and a half of claret; and even that seemed too much for his enfeebled digestion, for his eyes grew heavy before he lay down his fork, his chin fell upon his breast

and he slept a minute after Mr. Tickel had turned his chair about to face the fire.

Mr. Tickel recounted in a low voice to Lydia what had passed between him and Sir Gilbert.

“You see, my dear, pretty clearly now how the land lies,” he said in conclusion. “These cunning wicked villains have been doing their best to kill Sir Gilbert without running the risk of being charged with his murder. Another month of melancholy gloom and porridge would very likely have finished the business. Happily, low diet, inaction, solitude, and dismal surroundings have worked an effect upon his mind infinitely stronger than the most conclusive arguments would exert upon a man in vigorous health and lively circumstances. Thus his enemies have served his friends to their own undoing. He is well disposed towards Blase—not as I take it from any strong feeling of affection, but

from a fear of the hereafter, which commonly seizes persons of slender morality when they are suddenly bereft of the exuberant animal forces which made them careless."

"Oh, don't you think his heart is really turned?" asked Lydia sadly. To her Sir Gilbert's "conversion" had seemed very beautiful and true.

"There's no doubt that his temper is altered. I think his physical condition will never permit him to return to his old courses. As for his heart, my dear, 'tis not governed by morality. Men may be strictly conscientious and yet heartless. But that which the highest sense of rectitude cannot do may be done by the subtle power which gentle women possess. 'Tis their tears and smiles that soften and expand our hearts."

Lydia made no response. After a minute's pause Mr. Tickel continued :

“To come back to the practical business we are upon, my dear. Excited and dazed by what has happened this morning, Sir Gilbert will be unable to take any action with regard to his enemies to-day. It would be unwise to bring them face to face with him before he is thoroughly convinced of the course he ought to take. We know not what arguments they might bring forward in their own defence, or how those arguments might affect the weak judgment of Sir Gilbert. When he wakes he will expect to talk about religion, and I shall take care to bring chapter and verse against the party in the watch-tower. To-morrow will be quite early enough to fetch them up for judgment. And remember, Lady Godwin will claim her right to stay with her husband whatever becomes of her ---her priest and his son. Happily we can produce a strong witness on our side in Hutchins.”

Lydia, starting up, said :

“I will produce a stronger witness than Hutchins.”

“What do you mean, my dear?” the parson asked, his eyes opening wide.

“You will see,” answered Lydia, her eyes sparkling. “Although I am a woman I am not obliged to tell all my secrets. I am going to leave you for awhile.”

“Where are you going?” he asked, as she went towards the door.

“For a drive,” she said, and slipped out of the room smiling.

“Is she going to Redwater to fetch that old captain?” wondered Mr. Tickel. “Hang me if that will do any good. The old fellow’s dread of a public scandal will lead him to oppose anything like justice being meted out to these forgers. I must go and tell the girl that she’ll do better to stay at home, if that is her object.”

Having assured himself that Sir Gilbert

was still asleep, the parson left the room and descended the stairs. At the foot he found Beagles.

“Go up stairs, my man, and sit in the room with your master,” said Mr. Tickel; “if he wakes hail me from the window.”

“That I will deu, zir, read’ly. And, axin your pardon, zir, I ha’ made bold to carry a pit cowcumber in vor yewer dinner, hearin’ from young missy’s wench as you be a bit gluttonish like, and so bein’ we all owes ye suthin’ for kindness to Zir Gilbert.”

“Thank you, my good fellow, I am a bit gluttonish in such matters, and a pit cucumber I shall enjoy immensely.”

Lydia had given her orders, and the energetic young coachman was bestirring himself to get out the chariot with an alacrity which could not have been exceeded had it been one of Mr. Bramah’s patent engines and the hall in flames. He

perceived that his operations excited considerable curiosity to the prisoners on the tower; and, looking up, he shook his head gravely at Father Dominick, as if to signify that his last hour was near at hand, and with his lips shaped the word "Constables."

By the time Lydia appeared upon the hall steps in her hat and pelisse he had harnessed in the horses, and was buttoning up his livery coat.

"My dear," said Mr. Tickel to Lydia, "I implore you not to be rash. I conclude that you are going to fetch Captain Davenant; but, believe me, his presence here may do more harm than good."

"Perhaps I am not going for Captain Davenant," said Lydia, laughing. "Will you open the gates for me?"

"Well, my dear, you are a little sphynx, and I will not attempt to read your riddle. But will you not take any one with you?"

“No; there is no danger, and I have no fear.” And the parson tried but in vain to get any further explanation from her.

Lydia stepped into the carriage and the parson hurried off to the gate, while the young coachman, having folded up the steps and shut the door, sprang up into his seat and shook the reins. In a couple of minutes the gates were passed, and the chariot was speeding away from the Moat as quickly as the horses could be made to go.

Returning in perplexity from the gate, Mr. Tickel looked into the chapel.

“Some of them have been scratching with a knife or something at the bolt through the chink,” whispered Hutchins, pointing to the door.

“Go find me a hammer and a couple of stout nails,” said the parson.

Hutchins went off at once, and shortly returned with a box of tools. Mr. Tickel selected a suitable nail, and, setting it

behind the top bolt, drove it into the door. Then he did the same by the lower bolt. The heavy blows resounded through the chapel, and doubtless ascended to the ears of the prisoners in the tower with grim import.

“You need not watch here any longer, Hutchins,” said the parson when his work was finished satisfactorily to himself. “Come with me. ’Tis half-after one, and about time we began to think of our prisoners’ diet.”

The basket was still in the embrasure where Hutchins had placed it. At Mr. Tickel’s request the ladder was set up against the tower and the basket brought down. The dainties so carefully selected by Mr. Tickel had not been touched. He took the basket to the kitchen and emptied it.

“Have you made the mutton broth I ordered, cook?” he asked.

“Yes, zir; here it be in the ztew-pot.”

“Put it on the board here. Show me what quantity of the stuff has been given to Sir Gilbert for his dinner.”

“This here moogful, zir.”

“Let me have three of those mugs, cook. and a stone bottle and a funnel.”

When these articles were placed before the parson he said :

“Very good. Now make three pints of toast-water and put it in a bottle.”

While this beverage was being prepared Mr. Tickel carefully measured out three porringers of the broth. and poured them into the bottle.

“Sir Gilbert is in the habit of taking a mess of porridge for his supper, I believe?”

“He deu, zir; poor gentleman.”

“You will prepare sufficient porridge for three this evening, cook,” said Mr. Tickel: and then, putting the two bottles, three porringers, and a beaker into the basket,

he carried it up to Hutchins, and desired him to place it in the embrasure. This act of justice performed, he helped to remove the ladder, and then returned to Sir Gilbert's room.

A little later Sir Gilbert awoke. When he had collected his thoughts and recalled what had taken place, he looked round the room, and said :

“Where is my boy's sweetheart?”

“She has gone for a drive, sir.”

“She will come back? She is not bitter against me?”

“’Tis not in her nature to be bitter. She would forgive her worst enemy if he suffered and sorrowed as you do, sir.”

“There is forgiveness above for those who repent, parson—you believe that?”

“I do thoroughly, sir, if those who have done wrong do also, beside repent, strive their utmost to undo the ills they have done. But this is a subject, sir, which

time will not permit us to enter upon just now. Dinner will be served in half an hour, and I hope you will permit my man to take your beard off before you go down to the hall."

"Go down to the hall?" repeated the baronet in a faint tone of astonishment.

"To be sure, sir. You'll take your place at the head of your board now the usurpers are turned out, and order your servants, and do the honours of your house to your visitors; for I may tell you there's a lady related to your son's sweetheart who is punctilious in such matters."

The baronet's eyes glistened with the thought of being recognized once more as the head of the house. It was like being recalled from banishment.

Mr. Tickel called to Hutchins, who had received his orders, and was waiting in the adjoining room. The man responded at once, and appeared with a towel, a soap-

dish, and a razor. Sir Gilbert looked at him in silence for a moment, then, with a chuckle and a nod, he leant back in his chair. In a few minutes Hutchins had the beard off, and Sir Gilbert, passing his able hand over his chin, felt the smooth skin with evident satisfaction.

“You look a dozen years younger,” cried the parson. “Bring a glass, Hutchins. And I warrant you’ll eat and drink with satisfaction now your lips are disencumbered of their savage growth. Now, with a new neckcloth, and a coat instead of this gown, you’ll be fit to be seen by your household, od’s bobs!”

“Shall I have my hair off for a wig?” asked Sir Gilbert, pleased as a child with the encouragement.

“No, sir; I wouldn’t. Believe me, your little silvery curls are as pretty as a boy’s, and the mode now is for natural hair amongst our young London bucks.”

With the support of Hutchins and Mr. Tickel Sir Gilbert descended the stairs and reached the court-yard. At that moment the shadow of a cumulous cloud was swept away and the sun shone out. The baronet stood still and drew a long breath of the fresh air, his face flushed in the genial light with the emotion produced by a renewed sense of freedom and hope.

Half way to the hall his movement attracted the attention of those on the tower. For a minute they were silent. The sight of Sir Gilbert, thus dressed in his best and with his face shaven, may well have struck them with astonishment. Then Father Dominick and Lady Godwin both began to speak together.

Sir Gilbert stopped, turned towards the tower, and looked up at them.

“What do they say?” he asked.

“I know not,” replied Mr. Tickel with a laugh. “They make so much noise one

against the other that 'tis doubtful if they can hear their own words. But I'll tell you how you may answer them, and be understood. Shake your fist at 'em, sir, and let 'em know that you defy 'em and their efforts to rob you of your life and liberty."

Bending his shaggy brows Sir Gilbert raised his right arm and shook his clenched fist up at his enemies, silencing them at once.

He was led to the head of the table and seated in his own chair. Then he looked to the right and left with lordly and becoming dignity. Beagles, who had, since the baronet's illness and the consequent reduction of the household which had been made by Lady Godwin, served as butler, stood at some distance smiling broadly and rubbing his thighs in glee. An imperious look from his master brought him at once to a proper sense of his position.

Sir Gilbert received Mrs. Romsey with a pompous formality that awed that lady, and ordered a seat to be placed at his right hand for her. Then he commanded dinner to be served, and despatched Beagles to the cellar with particular orders as to the wine he was to bring—all with an ostentation which was comic and tragic also. It was ludicrous as the likeness to a man in a child, pitiful as the likeness to a child in a man.

He ate of the meats Mr. Tickel cut up for him, but he grew languid and inattentive as the mental excitement abated, and his feeble forces relaxed. Unconsciously he laid down his fork, his chin dropped, his head fell back, and he slept.

“If you will excuse me, Mr. Tickel,” whispered Mrs. Romsey, laying down her knife and fork, and rising in alarm, “I will go up to my room. I feel certain something dreadful is going to happen

to the poor lame gentleman. I will send Anne down to see if she can be of any use."

"Do, madam," said Mr. Tickel gravely, as he went to Sir Gilbert's side.

Mrs. Romsey fled at once, while the parson, having put the baronet's head in a comfortable position, returned to his seat, carrying with him the bottle which Mrs. Romsey had been rapidly emptying.

"You can assure your mistress, Anne," said he to Lydia's maid when she came down, "that there is no immediate danger, and that I will call Beagles if the symptoms become more alarming."

Mr. Tickel calmly finished his dinner and the bottle, and was smoking a pipe of tobacco when Sir Gilbert awoke.

In the course of the afternoon Mr. Tickel fulfilled his promise and talked of religious matters to the baronet, quoting many passages from Holy Writ to stimulate his

feelings of justice and revenge, and pointing out that his duty was not only to do right himself, but to punish others for doing wrong. As a practical corollary to this exordium he proposed that they should search Father Dominick's rooms at once for written proofs of his guilt.

The baronet acquiescing, Hutchins was called to give his assistance to the baronet, and they made their way to the priest's private apartment. The door was locked, but on Hutchins throwing his weight against it the catch burst. Everything within the room was in perfect order; and as the writings were not likely to be anywhere but in the *escritoire*, Hutchins was sent to fetch a punch and a hammer and force the lock. This was done, the baronet sitting near and watching the operation with trembling interest.

The desk was as neatly kept as the room. The papers were arranged alpha-

betically in pigeon-holes. Mr. Tickel examined them one after another.

“ You have had a careful steward, sir,” said Mr. Tickel. “ He has regarded your interests in the management of your estate as if they were his own. A far-seeing, deep rogue. Here are your leases and agreements all in admirable order ; and better kept, I warrant, than if you had done ‘em yourself. Frugally and well has he managed matters I dare say, and all to your own advantage as it turns out. Every penny he saved in your name he reckoned for himself. Sly knave. Hum, here’s a book showing how you stand with your banker, and very pretty figures they look. If you take my advice, sir, you will despatch a messenger to your banker to-morrow morning, bidding him pay no one a farthing of your money until he has seen you personally.”

“ It shall be done—whatever you think is right shall be done.”

“Remind me of this the first thing to-morrow, Hutchins. Ha! Come to the end of the pigeon-holes and no sign of the forgeries yet. It was scarcely likely they would be placed with the other papers. We must look now for false bottoms and secret drawers.” And the parson tapped and hammered the sides of the desk with the handle of a chisel brought by Hutchins, his head aside to catch the sounds and with the air of an expert.

Tap tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap tap, top top top.

“Ha, ha; what’s this?” cried he, and he hammered again.

Top top top.

Satisfied with the sound, he turned the chisel round without wasting time in searching for the secret fastening, and drove the blade into the thin wood that formed the bottom of one of the pigeon-holes. The wood split, and under the

average of the class law in it springs.
 Mr. Tread signed his name through the
 door and then looking about for a minute
 it seemed drew out with his finger and
 turned a little parchment.

"Here," he said, "said he." "Will
 you examine it for please with I had
 at a time the longest I had there I had
 certain."

"This is the will they wanted me to
 sign," said the mother.

"And you would change them?"

"No," I was answered.

"So I have said for the mother
 and signed it for you."

"So please show the parchment open
 and signed to the door."

"No," he said, "I will be answered."

"Will my son and daughter?"

"Here," he said, "said Mr. Tread
 suddenly." "And I said that he answered
 to him that it is the mother and which

they took their morning tea and went to bed.

It was the best of contrivances.

And now Sir Gilbert, if you have no objection," said Mr. Toker, when the partners had examined the patent-rights again and again. "I'll put these in my pocket, and we will go to the hall, as I hear the sound of wheels which tells me that our young lady has come back from her drive. Presently, Edmunds, you will close up that desk and drive a couple of stout servants and I to keep it shut."

Benjamin came to demand the key of the gate and hurried off to admit the carriage. The horses were fed with corn, and the young machinist's excitement seemed to be no less intense than when he started. Beside him sat Miss Tatterton's maid, and possibly her bright presence had something to do with the young fellow's animation.

In the chariot Captain Davenant sat opposite to Lydia, and by her side was Miss Davenant. Lydia's left hand and Miss Davenant's right were tightly clasped together.

Supported by Mr. Tickel and Hutchins, Sir Gilbert limped along the rooms towards the hall, where a greater surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH NEMESIS DOES HER WORK AT
GODWIN'S MOAT.

THE following day at twelve o'clock, Hutchins and Beagles left the hall, crossed the court-yard, passed through the gate house, unlocked the outer gates, and threw them open. Then they went up the steps into the chapel, and there Hutchins with a hammer and chisel cut through the nails which Mr. Tickel had driven in behind the bolts, drew back the fastenings and opened the door.

The three captives were waiting at the foot of the staircase. They came out of their prison in silence—Lady Godwin first,

Father Dominick, and after him Eugenius. Lady Godwin and Father Dominick descended the stairs without looking at Hutchins or the gardener; Eugenius lingered behind, and turned his back as if to walk in the chapel.

“It is ordered, sir,” said Hutchins, “that you are to go into the hall or out by the gates at once.”

“Who orders that?” asked Eugenius.

“Sir Gilbert Godwin.”

Eugenius bowed and descended the stairs to the gateway, whence he followed Father Dominick and Lady Godwin who were now ascending the steps to the dining-hall.

A long table had been drawn across the hall at that end from which a door opened into the room where the interview had taken place between Sir Gilbert and Blase. Behind the table sat Sir Gilbert Godwin; upon his right hand was seated Captain Davenant, upon his left Mr. Tickel.

A strange mixture of apprehension and determination appeared in the baronet's grey face. He tried to close his mouth firmly, and the trembling lips refused. His brows twitched as he bent them; and as he fixed his eyes upon the entrance by which his enemies were to appear, the lids contracted in the painful manner of one awaiting an inevitable blow. Mr. Tickel spoke in a low undertone to him, but he seemed not to know it. Presently the sound of footsteps quickly approaching were audible. Sir Gilbert bent his right arm upon the table and lowered his head, still keeping his eyes upon the door, but looking under his brows. He did not change his position as Lady Godwin, followed closely by Father Dominick, advanced up the hall.

Lady Godwin looked like a fish-wife. There had fallen a shower of rain the preceding evening and she had stood out

in it obstinately. When she could bear the chilly night air no longer she had descended to the bell floor and thrown herself down in the accumulated dust and dirt of years. Her face now was smirched and grimed with dust, her hair dishevelled, and her dress covered with cobwebs and clinging wisps of straw. Furious with anger her coarse and sensual features were simply repulsive. Looking at her now, Sir Gilbert might well wonder what madness had possessed him to be her slave.

Father Dominick was scarcely altered. Even in the supreme moment of his defeat the cautious observance of order in every action had not been neglected. He had neither given way to irrational fury, nor stood in the rain to get wet, nor thrown himself in the dust. His saturnine face was saturnine still; the only difference that could be seen was that the charac-

teristic expression of each feature seemed more pronounced.

Eugenius looked scarcely more pleasant to the eye than his mother. There was the sullen vicious look of a well whipped cur about him. Between the fury of his mother and the pitiless sarcasms of his father, it is probable that he had passed through a very miserable stage of his existence during the last twenty-four hours.

“What is the meaning of this?” cried Lady Godwin approaching the table. “What is this mummary? Why am I treated thus?” She struck the table with her fist and leaned forward towards Sir Gilbert. “Do you know that I have been caged up like a rat, mocked at by your servants, and shamefully abused? I demand instant redress, and the punishment of those who have put this insult upon me.”

Sir Gilbert, without changing his position in the least, attempted to speak ; his lips moved but only an unintelligible sound came from them.

Lady Godwin glanced along the table and seeing a space at one end between it and the wall strode towards it. Hutchins, who had followed Eugenius into the hall, stepped into the gangway and stopped it.

“Stand aside, fellow,” she cried. “My place is beside my husband.”

“It is,” said Captain Davenant ; “take that place.” And he pointed to Father Dominick.

“It is for Sir Gilbert alone to dictate to me ; I am his wife and second only to him in this house. I will listen to none but him.”

“Speak, sir,” said Mr. Tickel aloud to Sir Gilbert, and he added instructions in an under tone.

Sir Gilbert with an effort said :

"You are not my wife. I have done with you."

"He is mad," Lady Godwin cried with a sardonic laugh, "and I alone am mistress here. What! do you think to shake me off with a word because you have lost your senses?"

"No. Sir Gilbert shakes you off because he has recovered them," said Mr. Tickel.

"Let him try! Use your present advantage to thrust me from this house, and I will return with the law's support to overturn your pitiful petty attempts, and to revenge every insult I have received. Why should I waste time to reason with a madman and fools like you," she shouted, bending over the table in rage towards Mr. Tickel. "I will go to the nearest magistrate and he will at once restore me to my position here as the wife of Sir Gilbert Godwin." She raised herself and

turned as if about to act on this notion forthwith.

Sir Gilbert still leaning heavily on his right arm and looking under his brows, being nudged by the parson, said once more :

“You are not my wife. I have done with you.”

The words exasperated her beyond endurance. Turning to the table and striking it again she cried.

“Not your wife, madman? Are there not proofs that I am lawfully wedded to you?”

Sir Gilbert turned his head helplessly towards Mr. Tickel.

“Madam,” said Mr. Tickel gravely, “there is incontestible proof that you are not Sir Gilbert’s lawful wife.”

The woman who had borne the title of Lady Godwin so long, turned aghast to Father Dominick.

“The marriage was made according to the laws of this country,” said he; “the certificate and registry exist.”

“What do you say to that?” cried the woman.

Mr. Tickel turned to Sir Gilbert. The baronet, who seemed incapable of entertaining more than one idea, repeated :

“You are not my wife. I have done with you.”

Captain Davenant spoke.

“What Sir Gilbert Godwin has said is sufficient,” said he. “You are not his wife, and he has done with you. Why he resolves to disburthen himself of you, the consciousness of your own ill deeds should explain. Why you are not his wife it is not compulsory on him here to tell. To end this scene, however, and to close with silence a shameful history I will venture to make known to you some facts of which you at least are ignorant.”

He addressed the woman. "You remember what your relations with Father Dominick were before your marriage with Sir Gilbert. It was not sufficient that the priest possessed you; he dared also to desire my daughter, then Lady Godwin. To facilitate her ruin, he ruined her husband by bringing him under the influence of your charms. While Sir Gilbert was in London paying his addresses to you, his chaplain was here subtly striving to turn Lady Godwin from her fidelity. Failing in these endeavours he crowned his villainy by attempting to violate her honour. In that attempt a knife caught up by Lady Godwin in defence was turned against her by the priest, either in accident or with the design of saving himself from discovery——"

"If this was so," said Father Dominick with contempt, "why was I not arrested for the murder of Lady Godwin?"

"There is no proof that you intended to murder her."

"There is no proof to justify any detail in your accusation."

"There is proof," said the captain fiercely ; "a witness exists."

"Who ? *That* fellow ?" Father Dominick indicated Hutchins with a scornful glance.

"He was in London at the time. My witness was present."

"Produce your witness."

"I will, when it is necessary." Captain Davenant turned to the woman. "When Sir Gilbert returned to this house he brought you with him. He announced that you were his wife. But at that time I knew his marriage was invalid."

"Why, I want to know ?" asked the woman stamping her foot impatiently.

"Because another wife existed."

"Another wife !" she screamed.

“Your witness can prove that also, no doubt,” said Father Dominick with a cool irony that contrasted vividly with the excited tone in which his companion spoke.

“She can,” said Captain Davenant, and he rose from his chair. He passed through the door in the end of the hall. The door was watched with eager interest even by the cynical priest. Sir Gilbert, rising for the first time from his moody position, leaned back in his chair, and his face expanded under the influence of gentler emotions as he turned his eyes towards the entrance.

The rustle of a silk dress was heard, and Captain Davenant returned, leading his daughter, the Miss Davenant of this history. She came to Sir Gilbert's side and stood there with her hand upon his shoulder.

“This is my witness,” said Captain Davenant.

Father Dominick fixed his eyes upon her for a moment, and then dropped his chin upon his breast.

“And who is that woman?” cried the late Lady Godwin.

“My daughter Margaret, the first and only wife of Sir Gilbert Godwin.”

“His wife?” She turned to Father Dominick who made no response by word or gesture. “She was murdered—she was buried.”

“She was not murdered. She recovered from the wound. ’Twas her sister Gertrude who died, and whose death suggested the change of name adopted.”

“’Tis false; ’tis a trick to cheat me! If she lived why did she not claim her right as Lady Godwin?”

“For several reasons: because, while you retained your hold over the mind and body of Sir Gilbert she could never take her place here; because her son Blase was

allowed to remain with her and me at Redwater ; because a public exposure would have done no good ; because it would have precipitated Sir Gilbert's ruin, and so have destroyed the only hope there was of triumphing over you, and restoring the fortunes of her son and her husband."

" 'Tis a lie ! I will not believe that the woman standing there is the wife who was stabbed in the west wing," said Mrs. Warren, for the woman may no longer be called Lady Godwin, crossing her arms.

Captain Davenant's daughter wore a net handkerchief crossed upon her bosom. She drew it down and exposed a red scar upon her throat.

Mrs. Warren turned to Father Dominick. He took no notice of her ; but the expression of his face gave her no hope. She turned her furious eyes upon Eugenius.

" 'Tis you !" she cried ; "you cursed fool, who have brought us to this pass."

And with that she flung back her right arm striking him in the mouth with her clenched fist and with all her force, and causing the blood to flow from her own hand and his lips. And then she turned about and strode from the hall. Eugenius slunk out after her.

“You will permit me to remove my property from this house?” said Father Dominick.

“No part of this house is open to you,” said Mr. Tickel, “excepting the exit.”

“Very well, sir. I will go; but understand I shall return with authority to remove all that is mine from my rooms.”

“You will do better to decamp while your shoes are good,” said Mr. Tickel. “Delays are dangerous. And I warn you that if you are not out of the country in twenty-four hours you will be arrested for having appropriated five or six thousand pounds of Sir Gilbert Godwin’s money in

purchasing the conveyance of an estate by means of a forgery, the proof of which is contained in this document which I hold in my hand." Mr. Tickel held up the deed and shook it warningly at Father Dominick.

"The game is yours," said Father Dominick with a forced laugh; and he walked from the hall, and in silence led his discomfited family out of Godwin's Moat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH ENDS THIS EVENTFUL HISTORY.

“THE next thing, my dear,” said Mr. Tickel, when he met Lydia after the scene in the hall, “is to save our Blase from bullets and bayonets.” And to this fresh demand upon her energies Lydia was eagerly responsive.

Mr. Tickel was for sending a letter begging him to come home at once, at whatever cost, and share the general joy ; and had his advice been followed Blase, in all probability, would have contrived to gratify all wishes, and so have escaped the ball which laid him low ; but Lydia would accept no such weak conclusion to her

triumph. Nothing would satisfy her vanity but that she must see with her own eyes the surprise and wonder with which Blase would hear of her bravery and devotion.

Therefore, with many a groaning complaint, Mr. Tickel packed his valise, and bade adieu to the flesh-pots of Godwin's Moat. Lydia could not go alone, and Mr. Tickel was nothing less now than her slave.

The regiment was still stationed in Dublin. Blase was sitting in a corner of the mess-room reading, when a messenger brought word that a gentleman at the George Hotel wished to see him upon a matter of importance at his first convenience. The message unaccompanied by name was odd enough, but Blase having nothing on hand saw no reason why he should not comply with the request. He readily got leave of absence, for "Gentleman Godwin," as the men called him, was

on the best terms with the officers which their relative positions would permit.

The lad who brought the message was standing at the door of the George and led Blase at once upstairs to the rose chamber, where he threw open the door announcing Mr. Godwin.

Blase entered the room and found himself face to face with Mr. Tickel.

“Oh!” he exclaimed with a smile, “’tis *you* that want me.”

“No, no, ’tis I that want you!” cried Lydia, springing from behind the door, where she had hidden herself, and throwing her arms about his neck—“’tis I, my darling! my Blase!”

For a moment Blase was stupefied with astonishment; but it took him no longer to recover and to meet with his lips the kisses Lydia showered on his cheek.

“Yes, dear, yes,” she cried. “You may hold me quite tight to your heart now

for I am yours, all that there is of me, for ever and ever."

"Amen!" said the parson rubbing his hands cheerfully.

"Why, my sweetheart, how——" Blase cried in wonder.

"I have done it—nearly all myself. I shut them up in the watch tower, though I thought I should have died with fright when I had done it, and I've got it back again—here, where is it?" she searched hurriedly in her pocket and brought out the deed already known to Blase. "There—there it is, dear. I've won it all back for you, your heritage and your father's love—and there's nothing now to prevent my being your wife. And your Aunt Gertrude is your mamma, and I knew it when she came to London, and that was why she hated me so because I would let you go away as a soldier rather than make you my husband. For of course she couldn't

feel as we do, and did not know that you were too proud, you dear love, to marry me when you really saw how our honour and happiness depended upon your independence. Because they did not murder her after all, you know, dearest, though they nearly succeeded in killing your father, poor dear old gentleman, and would too, if it had not been for me."

"And the parson," suggested Mr. Tickel.

"Oh yes, he has been very good, the parson. But he wouldn't have done anything without me; and really it was I who did all the terrible part of it, and who won you back for my dear, dear husband."

It was some time before Blase could make head or heels, as the parson put it, of Lydia's rambling rhapsody; but when he saw clearly all that Lydia had braved for his sake, he sat down in a chair and looked at her in silence, while the tears

started from his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

“You brave, you dear, you glorious girl!” he cried at length in broken tones; and then he caught her to his heart again, wetting her cheeks and lips with his tears, while Mr. Tickel turned away and looked out of the window.

“And now that all the difficulties are overcome,” said Lydia presently, “you will sell out or buy a substitute or whatever is necessary, and go back to England with us at once, won’t you?”

He was silent for some minutes, then shaking his head he said :

“No, Lydia love, I can’t go back to England with you yet awhile. My good qualities are so few that I dare not spoil the only one which claims my self-respect.”

“Devil take me if I know what you’re driving at with your fine phrases,” said Mr. Tickel, turning sharply from the window.

“I cannot quit my regiment at the moment when my service is wanted,” said Blase. “I have taken up the musket and I shall not lay it down until the danger of rebellion is past, or the rebellion quelled.”

“Or you get a ——” Mr. Tickel stopped short as he caught sight of Lydia’s face, which had grown colourless at his suggestion.

It was a struggle for Lydia to overcome her womanly fears and weakness, but the courage of her father was in her spirit, and she triumphed after a while.

“You are right, dear love!” she said; and then with a little smile, “it won’t do for all the bravery to be on my side.”

“D—— the soldiering!” muttered the parson.

The lovers parted once more, but with greater courage on the part of Lydia than when they separated at Woolwich. In the course of a fortnight the rebellion broke

out. Blase fired his first shot at Naas; and it was hoped that the rebels would be satisfied with this beating; but the rebellion spread with the prospect of help promised by France. Blase fought again at Ballynahinch and came out from the battle scatheless. But at Castlebar he was hit early in the fight, and after manfully keeping on his feet and firing his piece for some time with the blood running from his shoulder down his arm and over his hand, a giddiness overcame him and he dropped. When he recovered consciousness he found himself in a hut with a dozen other wounded fellows. Weak as he was he managed to write on a page of his pocket-book these words, "Hit, but strong enough to write—I love you, darling." This news he found means to have put under cover and sent off with the despatches.

His wound was not serious. The ball had cut the fleshy part of his shoulder

without touching the bone; but it put an end to his campaign, and as soon as he could be moved he was taken home, his sweetheart nursing him all the way with a wonderful gentleness and care. Her loving tenderness on this occasion was in earnest of that abounding wealth of compassion and patient helpfulness which later on she bestowed upon her husband and her children.

She married Blase as soon as his wound was healed; and with their marriage ends this chapter of the story of their lives.

* * * * *

One day in the early part of December, Mr. Tickel, at the conclusion of a visit at Redwater, went on to Exeter instead of returning to London. He spent some time in walking about the streets examining the contents of the shops rather than the architectural beauties of the city. At length spying a particularly fine brace of

pheasants that hung in a poulterer's, he stopped, bought them, and turned his steps at once to that part of the town where Mrs. Romsey's house was situated.

Mrs. Romsey was sitting alone in her parlour, with a mournful expression upon her face, when her servant opening the door announced Mr. Tickel. The good lady greeted the parson with genuine delight, and as she warmly pressed his hand, cast a covert look of pleasure upon the birds attached by a string to his finger.

"If you will allow me, madam," said he, when the mutual civilities were exchanged, "I will lay these pheasants on that little side table, for they are so heavy that the string cuts my finger."

"By all means. What prodigious fine birds."

"You will find none like 'em in this part of the country, I wager. I was to have took 'em to London," the parson said,

without a blush, "but I preferred to bring 'em hither in the hope that you would accept 'em of me, madam."

"Oh, Mr. Tickel! That is so like you! You always were so thoughtful! And pheasants that come straight from the preserves are so different to those one buys at the poulterer's. I declare 'tis most wonderful kind in you."

"I fear, madam, I scarcely deserve to be so warmly thanked, for what use would the birds have been to me in London where now I have no home, and am forced to eat my meals alone at a tavern."

"Tut, tut, tut! To think of that now, sir! And you so fond of company. Well, solitude is hard to bear for all who have genial natures."

"It is," said Mr. Tickel, with a sigh that echoed Mrs. Romsey's. "But let us not think on it; for sadness is worse than a bad cook for disordering the stomach."

“That is too true, and if you knew what I have suffered in that respect during these past few weeks—but no matter. What news have you of my niece, dear Mr. Tickel.”

“Your niece, my dear Mrs. Romsey, and her husband are as gay as crickets, and they deserve to be. They have made the old house at Redwater young again. Captain Davenant spends best part of his time there, and I promise you he takes very kindly to the good things with which Blase loads the table, and looks all the better for his generous diet; but they spend Sundays with Sir Gilbert and Lady Godwin at the Moat, going there o’ Saturday and returning o’ Monday.”

“And that poor old baronet; is he any better?”

“He never will recover of his infirmity. But a calm and reasonable happiness reigns in his mind. ’Tis a peaceful sunset after a

stormy day. But what would his closing days be, madam, but for the tender comfort and tranquillizing assurances administered by a wife ? ”

“ To comfort a husband is the privilege and the joy of a good woman, Mr. Tickel. Have you any other news ? ”

“ No, madam, except that the young coachman who distinguished himself during those terrible days at the Moat, after winning the esteem of Hutchins, won the affection of Hutchins’ daughter, the pretty maid who attended Lady Godwin. You may remember her ? ”

“ Perfectly well. Dear heart ! Tut, tut ! So they will be marrying, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes ; their banns are to be put up for the first time next Sunday. It seems, madam, as if mankind was destined, like pheasants, to go in braces.’

“ Why should they not, when solitude is found to have no charm ? ”

“Sophia.”

“Oh, Mr. Tickel!”

The parson had put his arm as far round her waist as it would go.

“Sophia, shall we, akin in sympathy, alike in our antipathies, live asunder and in solitude?”

“Indeed, dear sir, this is so very sudden.”

“Do not let that consideration move you to reject me. If it is distasteful to you to give me your hand at once, permit me at least, Sophia, dear Sophia, to encourage the hope that about the middle of next March——”

“Next March!” exclaimed the widow, frightened out of her propriety; and then, with a blush and a sigh, she held out her hand to the parson at once.

THE END.

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